

HA S

2008

KULA MANU


ART AND

LITERARY MAGAZINE

Aloha

KU HALEWAHI





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Kula
Manu
2008

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY HAWAII

Cover art, "Kula Manu- Art and Literary Magazine", by Kent Carollo.

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Kula Manu 2008

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A special thanks to judges of the English and Art Departments, participants, and the advanced creative writing class in all of their efforts to make this year's 2008 Kula Manu, a beautiful collection of writing, art, and photography. This year we've had a greater number of quality submissions than ever before. Mahalo for making this possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Essay

- 9 Experiencing Japan Naked Drew Mierzejewski
- 33 Character Building Nate Stout
- 49 Lake Creek Jennifer Chidester
- 55 Are You Chinese? Hua Ching Chang
- 75 Confessions of a True Southerner:
What Bless Your Heart Really Means Jennifer Youngblood
- 103 Hollow Road Cat Conner

Fiction

- 1 The Day She Saw His Face Ting Ee Wen
- 21 Princess Tiger Lily Lillian Asuao
- 39 Soda Kills Erika Kuta
- 67 My Inheritance Lisa FeHoko
- 81 Case # 23TV728Zh:
Emperor Rashykk vs. the people of Jawrak . . Vasu Chetty
- 89 In the Middle Jonathan Marler

Poetry

- 15 Directions Might Veer Kat Rae Scarpelli
- 17 Leaders? Isabel Sakaja
- 18 The Warrior Randall Allred
- 28 First Recital Mari Murdock
- 30 Time You Fickle Little Thief Vasu Chetty
- 47 When I am a Husband and Father Drew Mierzejewski

- 61 LiberationBJ Liau
- 63 The Interlude of Light and DarknessBrandon Orgill
- 64 ElijahShem Greenwood
- 78 FrogsLarisa Schumann

Art

- 8 In the RainChihiro Howe
- 20 In the Heart of AfricaVincent Murahwa
- 77 UntitledDanielle Jarvis
- 79 ArcturusWulf Barsch von Benedikt
- 88 Good ConversationKent Carollo

Photography

- 7 Lily at the Grand PalaceAmy Hinkle
- 16 CarMcKenzie Fogg
- 27 Living in ColorKiley Bishop
- 31 Day I Woke Up EcstaticCassandra Chen
- 32 SignsGreg Steele
- 38 Kensington Church StreetGreg Steele
- 48 WisdomAissa Carreon
- 60 Flying SunKeola Harrison
- 62 TelescopeJennifer Chidester
- 65 UntitledDebbie Frampton
- 109 Nunda, New YorkJosh Weber

The Day She Saw His Face

Ting Ee Wen

An An was walking home from the paddy farm two miles away from her house with her grandmother. The sun was setting and they were both exhausted from the day's hard work. The famine had destroyed the paddy and other crops they planted. She had been hoping to get some of the paddy from their harvest to buy a new pillow, the large and soft kind. The pillow she used now was eleven years old, a present her mother had given her a few years before she died of tuberculosis. However, rain had not fallen for almost three months now and she did not expect a good harvest. She gave up the hope of sleeping at night on a big soft pillow.

An An pulled the water buffalo while chatting with her grandmother. They were the only two members of their family left in the village. All of her uncles and aunts had gotten married and left to the bigger towns far from Fuzhou province. Some of her uncles sent money back to her grandmother, but the money ran out fast because they needed to pay the rent of their house, which increased yearly. Her grandmother dared not complain to her sons because they were not doing so well in the cities either. The thought of asking for money from her daughters never crossed her mind because the married daughters were not part of the family anymore. They were like the water poured out from the pail, unable to be collected back again.

As they got closer to their house, they saw some neighbors sitting outside of their low wooden gate. Their closest neighbor who lived five minutes away came up to them and helped with the water buffalo.

"What is happening? Why are you sitting outside of our house?" An An's grandmother asked in the Fuzhou dialect.

"Let's go into your house and we can talk about this exciting news," the neighbor's wife said, pulling at An An's grandmother.

"An An, we are going in now. Feed Xiao Kuai before you come into the house. Remember to wash your hands well," her grandmother said, leading the neighbors into the house.

An An tied the water buffalo on a pole supporting their wooden house and walked to the back of the house to a small pond her grandfather had built before he passed away. She filled a wooden bucket with water and brought it to the buffalo. "Drink up, Xiao Kuai. Tough day today," she said, watching the buffalo drinking. Just then, her old dog came wagging its tail and licked her hand.

"You tickle, you know that, Lao Huang?" She patted the skinny dog's head. He sniffed around her feet.

"You are so bony." She looked at her dog, then looked at her neighbor's paddy field far away. "if it doesn't rain soon, the harvest will be bad. I don't know if we will have any leftover food for you anymore," she sighed.

She heard her grandmother calling from inside the house. She washed her hands in a pail of water and ran inside.

"We were just talking about you, An An," a neighbor said, smiling at her as she entered.

She looked at the five people in their small house. Three of them, including their grandmother, sat at the dining table. The other two sat on the floor close to the kitchen entrance.

"We were talking about you, An An," her grandmother repeated.

"Really?" She stood by the door, not sure where she should sit as there were only three chairs.

"Come, come sit by me. We can share a chair. You are so thin," said the neighbor's wife as she gestured for An An to come closer.

She sat down and her grandmother showed her a black and white picture of a man. Puzzled, she took the photo and looked at it. The face of the young man was not handsome. He was average looking with a thin face and a faint smile. A lot of men in Fuzhou were much more attractive than he was. But, she knew now was her turn. However, she couldn't help feeling nervous. She knew what was coming.

"Who is he?" she asked, putting the picture down.

"He is the eldest son of our old neighbor, Chung Fa. His name is Ching Fook. They used to live just not far from our village temple," her grandmother said.

"His father died twelve years ago and his wife took their two sons away to NanYang, where her brother lived. Life was better there. You know what they say about NanYang? There are many people who are not Chinese. But, we Chinese earned much more money than those

people there, whoever they are. We dig gold and minerals, while they only plant bananas and rubber trees,” Ming hock, a neighbor sitting at the kitchen entrance said, as if he had been to NanYang, countries in the South China Sea, before.

“He went there before you were even born. But he is looking for a wife now, in his home village,” said another neighbor who had helped her with the buffalo.

“Our cousin, who just came back from NanYang two days ago, brought this picture and a message from his mother, requesting a girl who is pure and hardworking to go to NanYang to marry him. They paid the dowry too. Money enough to buy another paddy field,” cheered the neighbor’s wife sharing the seat with An An.

An An felt thankful for her neighbor’s concern. Most girls were married when they were fifteen. Not many people wanted to come and propose marriage to her because her parents were dead. Her grandmother refused to marry her off because the dowry that those men proposed to pay was too small—a cow and some jewelry. “My granddaughter is so filial and beautiful, she is worth more than ten cows!” yelled her grandmother to one of the middle-women whose profession was to help men pull “red lines” or in other words, match-making.

She looked at her grandmother, who looked back at her sadly. An An understood that her family needed the money to pay the landlord. She looked at her grandmother’s bony, wrinkly hands and thought the dowry could get them out of debt, and her grandmother would not need to plow the paddy field anymore. *Perhaps NanYang really is better than Fuzhou. Perhaps I will live an easier life there, and not starve.*

“You cannot be by my side forever. I am already close to seventy. Not many years to live. You go on and live a good life there.” Even though she had consented, An An knew her grandmother felt sad to part with her.

The deal was made and messages were sent to NanYang to the family of her future husband that she would be joining them in two weeks. An An was excited for her new life. She had heard so much about the people in Canton province leaving home and going to, “Gold Mountain”, a far away land with plenty of money to earn and living much better life than she could imagine. The situation in China was bad enough after the war with the Japanese. Now, the long drought and famine made the people’s lives worse and many believed that the only way out of poverty and hard life was to leave China.

An An never thought that her chance would come so soon. She was only seventeen and she remembered when she was seven she had already felt sorry for her mother and grandmother, both widows who worked hard under the sun in the paddy field. She cried herself to sleep when she saw a pregnant neighbor planting and harvesting with her husband. She worried that some day she might end up just like her neighbor. An An detested eating only plain porridge because they had no extra money for meat and vegetables. They ate porridge because it filled them up faster than steamed rice and it used less rice to make porridge. She missed the years when there were good harvests and during those years she ate meat and even fish they usually could not afford. However, good seasons did not stay long and they could not rely on the sporadic good harvest.

For two weeks An An slept on her old hard pillow knowing that she would soon have a new pillow and a new life. She stared into the picture of her future husband every night, trying to imagine his voice, his personality, and life with him. She once heard a story from a farm girl in the neighboring village who told of another girl who was sent off to America as a bride to a man she knew nothing of or about. The girl was hoping for a good life in America, but her hope was ruined when she saw that he had no left leg. This story haunted An An for years, but she decided that her future was not in this village. Her life and even her grandmother's last ten or twenty years, depended on her. An An prayed every night to her mother that she would protect and bless her so that she would not end up marrying a handicapped man. She felt a strange connection with this man she had never seen before. Every time she felt worried about her unknown future, she looked into the picture and felt assured that life would be better. She believed that this marriage was fate. The gods and her dead ancestors were pointing her direction and guiding her out of starvation.

On the day she left her village, her grandmother gave her a pair of shoes that she had sewn every night under the oil lamp for the past couple of weeks. Clutching her small rattan suitcase and the new shoes, An An cried.

"Don't worry about me," said her grandmother, "I have these kind neighbors with me. Your third uncle is coming from the city to stay with me and help with the paddy. We will send a message to you when someone here goes to NanYang," her grandmother smiled despite the tears streaming down her cheeks, "Too bad we can't read, or I would be able to write you. Take care of yourself. Be a good wife and don't shame our family."

An An could not speak because she was choking on tears. She nodded at every word her grandmother said. She went with their neighbor's cousin to the harbor in Fuzhou city and boarded a ship to NanYang, knowing that she would never see her grandmother or village again.

After nine days on the ship, An An suffered seasickness and when they finally reached Malaya, one of the countries in NanYang, she was relieved. She had not been able to sleep well and ate very little on board. She walked back and forth on the harbor front, waiting for her new husband to take her. She was perspiring making the silk shirt stick to her back and under her arms. She took out her purple handkerchief from the left pocket of her loose fit silk pants. She wiped the sweat behind her neck and on her forehead. The seventeen year old felt embarrassed at not wearing makeup as she saw other older women on the ship powdering their faces before they went on land. With no money to buy cosmetics or perfume in Fuzhou, she wanted a long shower to make up for not taking a single bath in more than a week. Her husband was late and most of the people she met on the ship were already gone and she was one of a few waiting.

Looking around, she searched for the face in the picture. She saw many Chinese male laborers in three-quarter length pants, made from coarse and cheap material. They were shirtless and sweating from carrying the sacks of rice in the scourging NanYang sun. Chinese men with such dark skin were something An An had not seen before. The men walked past her hunchbacked as they carried heavy sacks of rice on their backs. Some laborers rested on the port of the harbor whistled and one called out to her, "Miss, oh beautiful Miss. What are you waiting for? Want some sweets?" She looked away blushing at the shirtless laborer with a gold front tooth. No man in her village dared be as bold and rude as what that man just did. These NanYang Chinese men were different. Desperate and afraid, she pretended to look at her shoes and play with her pigtails. Her eyes were tearing as she thought of her grandmother in China.

What should I do if he forgets about me? Where can I stay tonight? How do I get back to China? The thought that she might end up begging for food on the street made her feel like jumping into the ocean and ending her life. She prayed in her heart for her ancestors to look after her. She rubbed her sweaty palms on her pants because she felt alone in a country where she knew no one and no one knew her. She took out the black and white photograph and looked at the face which made her feel calm.

"Are you waiting for someone?" An An jumped at the voice coming from behind her.

"Yes," she said, turning to see the face of the man who surprised her.

She gasped, now looking into the real face of the man in the picture. He was older in person and did not wear fancy clothing like her neighbors in China talked about. He wore a clean white shirt and loose black pants. He had some grey hair amid his black, oiled hair. He was perhaps a foot taller than she was with a clean face, but darkened from the sun with some lines on his forehead and under his eyes. She thought he must have been about thirty-five years old.

"You finally came," she whispered.

"You are...Miss An An?" he asked. "I was waiting over there at the gate. I wasn't sure you were An An, so I waited until most of the people left."

An An smiled apologetically and said, "My grandmother and I were busy preparing for my trip and we forgot all about going to the city to take some pictures for you."

"Well. Now that I have found you, we don't need any pictures." He laughed as he put his hands into his pockets, looking nervous. "Oh. Have you eaten yet? We better get you home. My mother prepared some nice Fuzhou dishes for you." He reached for her small suitcase, "Let me help you with this. We'll walk to the bus stop over there."

An An watched his back as he walked away. This was the man she had day-dreamed about after she knew she was going to be his bride. This was the real version of him. This was the real him with expressions of care and admiration. From his eyes, she knew that he would treat her with honesty and respect.

"Are you alright? What are you waiting for?" he said as he turned back to see she wasn't keeping up with him. He looked concerned and reached his hand out to her, "Come, let's go home."

Shyly, she gave him her hand. They walked together to the bus stop, to the better life she longed for. The shadow of two strangers joined them as the sun set in the eventide.

Lily at the Grand Palace

Amy Hinkle



In the Rain

Chibiro Howe



Experiencing Japan Naked

Drew Mierzejewski

I grew up in Japan. I know I don't look it with my pasty skin, mahogany hued hair, and deceptively strong Germanic features, but believe it or not, I did, and I consider myself semi-at one with my oriental roots. But before you start asking me the hundreds of questions that are running through your mind right now, let's get a couple of things out of the way. 1) Yes, I am an American citizen, the true blue Yankee stock. My father, William Mierzejewski, works for the United States' Department of Defense and has been in their employ since 1984 and from that time until now we have lived in the Orient. 2) No, I do not speak Japanese. 3) Yes, I know that that is pathetic and it is my great tragedy that I never learned the noble Nippon tongue. But I have come to grips with my deep shame. And finally 4) Yes, I am aware how ludicrous the situation sounds; kid with Polish last name was born in Japan and does not speak Japanese but speaks Spanish. But it's all true; I have experienced the wonders of the Far East that at one time Marco Polo had to risk his life to observe. For me, it's not really that big of a deal, I mean it's all right outside my back window.

Over my 15 years of living in Japan, my parents made it a point that my siblings and I would learn as much about the culture as we could. Weekend excursions to remote mountains nestled in thick forest and to ancient historical sites ignited my imagination and helped me understand our host country that was now my home. My parent's motto "Try everything once" incited us to taste strange Japanese cuisine and experience cultural holidays for occasions that most Americans can only imagine. Our family exhausted ourselves exploring new terrain and seeking to understand the world around us, and we always had fun doing it. As my years in Japan progressed, I learned to not only accept this new exotic culture, I eventually came to love it.

Because of the adventurous spirit of my family, I have come to love all things Japanese. From the taste of fresh rolled sushi, down to the awe struck wonder as I pass through red Torii gates into sacred Shinto shrines. I learned to love the way Japan feels. The hustle of its towering cities that sparkle with more colors and lights than you ever

imagined, to the quiet stillness of a watery rice paddy reflecting a moon of pure silver. I loved the country side that passed us on our excursions and the seas of faces we meet when we got there. I have become fascinated by the Japanese world. Japan was where I lived and grew up, and yet its culture and customs were foreign to my own Caucasian American culture, a culture that pushes against the edges of the Japanese cultural soap bubble, where the two meet and join, but never merge.

But still, regardless of how different I looked or how strange my ways were to these people, I always tried to follow the motto of my parents and try everything. Up until the late spring of 2007 I thought that I had experienced just about everything you can in Japan. Karaoke, little road side hostels that serve you French fries for breakfast, tiny doors and furniture that most American's would balk at, mastering chopsticks, vending machines every 20 feet that vend everything you can think of, eating and sleeping on a floor of woven mats called tatami, and seeing forested mountains alight during the day with bright pink cherry blossoms (sakura) and ablaze at night with paper lanterns. Yet, one experience still eluded me. The experience of a authentic Japanese Bath-house and to tell you the truth I had never really given it much thought until I brought it up among my friends at college.

I am not exactly sure who brought it up, but for some reason the subject of puzzling foreign customs became the topic of one particular evening while I was at college. We each bantered back and forth about customs we had heard other cultures did, and then the question was asked about Japanese bath-houses (Sento). Naturally it was asked of me if I had ever been to one, since I was the one who was from Japan. I said that I had not and was jokingly placed under a bet that if I went to a sento the next time I went to visit my family then I would get five US dollars. We all had a laugh at this playful gambling and the conversation continued without further incident of note or any prodding of my forthcoming adventure in public bathing. In truth I really had no intention of going to a sento at all. The idea of bathing communally was not one I was overly excited with. I mean, I could barely do the whole showering in a group thing in high school, so bathing in groups was not at the top of my list. The bet was forgotten. My semester at BYU-Hawaii ended and I went back home to Japan.

A couple of months pass and its spring time in Japan again. The cherry blossoms are draped over the northern mountains, the balmy weather is returning and the prospect of summer has become omnipresent. As a kind of group get together before the summer starts,

my brother and his friends invite me to come with them for a day “off-base”. During the course of the day’s planned activities we decided to go to a little place near Sunset Beach called Chula-Lu. For lack of a better term, I will call it a spa. Now, I know it’s not very manly for a bunch of guys to go to a spa but this was a new experience for me, and so I went along and enjoyed such attractions as a sauna room, a swimming pool, a mineral hot spring and various other forms of aquatic relaxation, all with swimming trunks of course. But as it was almost time to leave I noticed that they also had a traditional Japanese bathhouse or sento (a section of the complex that was for bathing without your swim wear). Immediately the bet made months earlier jumped to my mind, and I debated whether I should try this new experience and claim my 5 bucks in the name of cultural experimentation.

Of course the decision was not immediate. I had a lot to think about. When the topic of public bathing comes to mind a lot of individuals, especially in my Latter-day Saint culture, immediately send up little red flags. Just the idea of being “Naked” sends spasms of fear through people. We have all had those dreams, vivid night terrors in crime noir black and white. You, in front of your peers as naked as the day you were born and those dreams are never pleasant, but rather horrible nightmares of laughing faces mocking as your whole existence lay bare. Because of this, we have come to think of being naked as something wrong or dirty. Our bodies have become something secretive and good little boys and girls would never undress in front of anyone, even those of their own gender. Now I don’t want you think that I am advocating a free life style of living in some sort of naked community in the woods or dropping your drawers in front of member of the opposite gender or something scandalous like that. I am actually quite a modest person. I think we all have issues about being self conscious about our bodies that people don’t want to address. It’s as if the naked human body is an evil taboo that if spoken about will unravel the very fabric of reality. Ultimately, these issues concern how we look to ourselves and how we want to be perceived by others. Therefore the idea of being naked in front of total strangers is not comforting, because being naked implies being comfortable about your body. This seems almost impossible to some people because I think deep down we all have image issues and baring those issues is frightening.

And let’s not forget that people sometimes look down on you for even asking the questions I am posing. Even thinking about nakedness, what it is, why it’s forbidden and its ramifications in society will brand you as a person not entirely squeaky clean. This accusation of being

less than squeaky clean is a huge black spot in LDS culture. So, not only must you worry about what people think about your body, but now you have to worry about people talking about the cleanliness of your mind and soul.

I had so many questions. There were so many “ifs” and “whys” and “how comes” in my mind as I sat there debating whether to go in or not. I expressed these thoughts to the friends who had come with me. Finally they suggested that I just go and do it. Again I debated and then finally realized that being naked and exposing yourself is something that I was going to have to deal with if I wanted to have this experience. So I mustered up my courage and decided that I was going to go and take a bath.

The sentos of Japan are not really like any other experience. It's not like you just go out in the nude and bathe like some kind of long haired hippie at Walden Pond. There are actually a lot of rules to go by and etiquette to follow. The process of getting into the sento takes some time. You take off your shoes at the door and are greeted with friendly bows and smiles as you pay your yen at the front desk. The Japanese lady I met asked me if I had any tattoos, to which I politely answered “No.” It seems that you cannot get into a sento with such body decorations. I asked why and she told me that the ink actually would bleed from your skin in the hot water of the baths. Also, tattoos are a calling sign of the Yakuza or Japanese Mafia, and she explained that such people were not welcome at their establishment. She then handed me a set of towels, one large and one small, and a traditional Japanese tunic and pants to take with me into the dressing room along with my key. We bowed politely and she directed me to the blue curtain that designated the men's side of the sento.

Having never done this, I moved to the locker room where my nerves contorted, filling my stomach with nervous knots. Of course, the room looked like your common locker room with the tall metal lockers you see in high school, so the principle was the same and there was no new custom or method. I disrobed, placed my belongings and towels in #1903 and apprehensively walked the 20 feet from the locker room to the sliding glass doors that marked the entrance to the bathing area. I made sure my modesty was intact via the covering of the small hand towel that was given me. This may seem a curious practice, but I saw others doing the same and thought, “When in Rome...” Nevertheless, I was surprised to discover that the actual cleaning process of bathing at a sento is very different from bathing at home. The first surprise is that you don't lather up in the tubs, but rather you shower before you enter

the pools. And even more surprising is that the showers are not traditional American stand up showers. Instead you find yourself faced with a row of plastic stools and showerheads positioned at chest height. At first this seems confusing for obviously the Japanese are smaller in stature but not THAT small. It took me a moment to realize that you have to sit down to take your shower and from there the process went a little smoother.

Along with your showerhead, temperature valve and less than comfortable plastic stool, there are three bottles positioned to the right of a small fog proof mirror, one bottle for conditioner, one for body wash, and one for shampoo. Lather, rinse, repeat as necessary. After showering off you are free to use any of the five pools. One with warm water, one with super hot water, a pool with jets much like a Jacuzzi, a warm pool outdoors and then an ice cold pool. There was also an option for a sauna, but that seemed one of the more popular attractions, so I stuck to the pools during this first experience.

I headed for the warmer pools to start my relaxing soak. The sento, on this particular day, was not necessarily crowded so I got the first pool all to myself. One of the larger pools in the bathing area was made of black marble and had a little faucet surrounded with fake rocks that supplied a constant stream of warm water to the pool. There were no drains so the excess water spilled out over the edges to the cold stone floor into stainless steel grates surrounding the pool. Where it went after that, I am not sure. The water was at knee height and hotter than I first anticipated. So I eased my way into the clear water and found a comfortable spot by the corner to sit and relax. I used the small hand towel that had been my close companion since the locker room as a pillow to prop my head up against the side of the pool and just watched the steam rise from the pool's surface.

Funny thing about sentos is that they are silent. No one talks while they soak. Most of the men I saw were older, as well as a few younger men, but no one talked to anyone and especially, no one stared at each other. I never felt like I was being sized up, or scrutinized because I was a foreigner or that I was naked. I was left to myself in silent contemplation of the world and life. It's like I had my own little slice of hot water heaven and not a soul dared intrude. It was not a place to be judged, but rather a place to relax even though you were baring it all.

I moved around to almost all the pools while I was there at the sento. The hot one was far too scalding for me and the Jacuzzi was

crowded so I never got a chance to use it. But I did use the outdoor pool quite a bit as well as the cold pool. The outdoor pool was surrounded by rocks and a lush Japanese garden, as well as high walls to hide the sento's patrons from being spied upon. It was a beautiful atmosphere, perfectly tailored to put all those around at complete ease. The whole feel of the sento worked like a charm, and I was more relaxed than I have ever been. Surprisingly this relaxed state washed over me at a time when I should have been the most tense and cautious with only a small hand towel as a cover.

I was so relaxed that I did not even notice the time passing as I switched from one pool to the next. I even took a second "sit down shower" before I realized that I had been at the sento for almost 2 hours. I did not rush out immediately though. Calmly I went back to the locker room and dressed, taking some leisure time to enjoy the authentic Japanese décor as I got my shoes and exited, reveling in my victory. I had done it. I had won my five bucks and the bragging rights to say that I had walked around naked for a few hours. It should have all been said and done there, but the strangest thing happened. I found that I actually enjoyed myself at the sento and it was not because I got to spend some time free from clothing. The experience was deeper than that, a coming together of ideas and a discarding of misapprehensions. I had bared all in front of total strangers and they had not laughed and pointed or mocked me. Instead, they had been polite and left me alone to relax as I washed away my cares. I was refreshed to know that people would not judge me, not that most people do judge me, but it was good just to be free, to not hide and be comfortable. Now, would I go to a nudist colony and bare my all there, or go skinny dipping with a bunch of friends? Probably not, remember I am a self proclaimed modest person, but this was different.

I never got my five dollars but that does not matter because now I can say that I experienced Japan. I have experienced the food, the sights, the sounds, the life, the clothed and the unclothed of my adopted home. I will be doing them all again, the sento included. Yet, even with all these sights and sounds I know there is much more to see. I have many more experiences to come and after going to a sento I think I can say that I am ready for whatever adventure the world has in store for me.

Directions Might Veer

Kat Rae Scarpelli

Driving can be a process of healing,
Or become the leading origin in an individual's heart attack.
Some people drive to emancipate a frustrated feeling,
The nastiest are the ones instructing from the back.
An open road conducts to endless possibilities,
Or guides one to a closed road full of regrets.
Green translates to GO in most visibilities,
Yellow creates vehicles to skip some heartbeats
Red is recognizable for its sojourning capability.
Forks, u-turns, dead ends, no outlets
The road so black that its luminosity appears clear,
Minute yellow markers segregate two conduits.
Progression to the left or right leads to life's extinction that may be near,
Buckling seat belts are wise because life's directions might veer.

Car

McKenzie Fogg



Leaders?

Isabel Sajaka

What is this world we
Are living in you leaders of tomorrow?
This world of uncertainty
Of what the future holds
For the so called
Leaders of tomorrow!
I thought tomorrow never
Comes and yesterday
Was never there, but no!
We have the leaders of yesterday
And the leaders of tomorrow,
Tomorrow that no one has yet seen
Why?
The leaders of yesterday want to make
Yesterday today
Yet,
Today is the reality and what of tomorrow...
Give us a chance to prove that
Yesterday is gone.
Let the dead of yesterday bury its dead
And let tomorrow have a chance,
For tomorrow is a vision of today
Today the reality and just maybe
As the sky turns pink, then yellow
And a dazzling gold,
When the sun bursts forth into the azure sky
Then we will see
Through the eyes of today
Tomorrow
And never yesterday.

The Warrior

Randall Allred

The lone warrior stands at the brink of night
With arms and hands wide, ready for battle,
And he with dark brow
Wonders how he shall know
The enemy which strikes at him unseen.
He dreams

A dream: a gathering of settlers at a grave
Far from home, exiled from misty Scotland,
In Aotearoa, the corner of the world,
In the shadow of looming Takanaki--
They mourn with the tragic wail of the pipes
Keening to the sky as one of their own,
A clan chieftan, is lowered to his rest:
An orphan's lone grave in alien soil.
Then blending with the rising cry at dusk
Of the forlorn pipes comes a clear high voice,
The trembling voice of te karanga, a woman
Singing as the Maori come down in file,
Holding candles--A line of lights, points of fire
Winding down the mountain's warm green slopes:
Trembling hands and breaking hearts sing the grief
Of all highlanders, of all orphans and exiles.
The Scots watch with awe as the Maori,
Proud warriors, come down as on angel's feet,
Cheeks stained with tears, the women's hands quaking
With the song. By the graveside, the song rising,
The keening of Celt and Maori with the pipes,
With tribute to the fallen one's mana
The men dance the haka, with steady, firm and
Stamping defiance--humble and fierce:

Ka mate, ka mate! They shout defiance to Death
Ka ora, ka ora! They shout affirming Life--
And now, O Death, where is thy sting?
O Grave, where is thy victory?

The vision closes. The warrior grasps
With sinewed hands at its beauty--
Grasping air, he winces with the fear
Of the orphan: *O Father, chieftan of all orphans and exiles,*
Where art thou? Where is thy hiding place? I
Fight alone, as one who beateth the air.
And when I am laid in the dust, battles
Fought, who shall keen my victory?

Like Cuchulainn, he stands at the sea's brink
With sword aloft; possessed, he strikes
At surging surf and milky foam. He cries
With rage as his blade slices water wide, but
Wounds close again as the waves march on,
Undaunted by his fury.
For three days and three nights
He strides through the surging shallows,
Slashing the surf, shouting
Defiance to the demons which haunt him.

Fight on, my brother, and may you yet
Win victories to the undaunting of your soul.

In the Heart of Africa

Vincent Murabwa



Princess Tiger Lily

Lillian Asuao

And now I, Mekana..

And I, Masina...

...tell a tale of things which we have both seen & heard.

The regal mongrel teetered high on the knee-edge of the High Talking Chief, Nofogatoto'a. His large protruding gut pushing against her back. Her short stubby legs hooked around his chiefly calf were all that kept her from falling off.

"All hail Princess TigerLily," he rumbled. Her mother sat off to the side, silent, an indistinguishable expression upon her face. Below them knelt three royal guards—Ali'ioaiga, Aliamanaia, and Saute.

Nofogatoto'a raised his hand, directing his massive index finger towards the guards. "You are to honor and respect her. You are never to lay a hand on her. It matters not if she does wrong; you are not to touch her. Protect her—that's your duty." The mother remained silent, passing a quick glance at the little princess, then bowing her head, a sad line curving against her jaw. The guards followed suit, solemnly lowering their heads but not before glaring at the little girl.

~

The village was in a state of discontent. With the majority being untitled men, there were several conspiracies to steal the Nofogatoto'a title, causing Nofogatoto'a to trust very few of his people. He even went as far as taking a palagi¹ wife, denying his enemies the option of deceiving him through the wiles of their native women. The only villagers he trusted were these three guards—but even that trust was limited. They were untitled men after all; it was only a matter of time before they would seek after his title as well.

Nofogatoto'a's distrust of men was conveyed in his concerns of the possibility of his wife bearing him a male heir. A son, though it be of his own flesh and blood, may rise against him, impatient to inherit his title. Yet the gods had mercy upon Nofogatoto'a and blessed him with a daughter. How great was his joy! And how determined he was to protect the only one he could completely trust.

~

Still perched on her father's knee, TigerLily perceived the distorted expressions the subjects hid from their chief. She glanced over at

¹foreigner

Nofoagatoto'a wondering whether he too noticed the visible discomfort that passed over the faces of her mother and guards. Ignorant of the concerns the four below him were struggling with, Nofoagatoto'a continued to dictate orders he expected the guards to carry out.

And so began the solitary life of little TigerLily...

For fear of what the Chief's fierce enemies would do to the little mongrel, the three royal guards shielded TigerLily from everything and everyone. Nofoagatoto'a's enemies could easily manipulate the young child if ever given the chance. For this reason, she was kept within the stone walls that surrounded the Chief's fale, seeing little of the common villagers, save for when they brought victuals to honor Nofoagatoto'a. TigerLily knew nothing of life beyond those walls.

Her childish curiosity eventually provoked her to sneak past the area that surrounded the Chief's hut. In her fourth year, Tiger Lily managed to toddle over the stone wall into the village. Walking along the grassy line in the middle of the dirt road, passing coconut palms and banana stalks sprouting from clumps of thick vines, she came upon a lush overstuffed chair covered in blood-red velvet. It sat on the porch of a seemingly abandoned shack. Skipping over, she plopped her tiny body into the sofa, sinking into the cushioned lushness. In a matter of seconds, her eyelashes fluttered until she fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

She awoke to a crowd of villagers, heaps of little lads and several large lumpy women. One of the women stepped forward, her thighs clapping as she walked. Her bright floral sarong strained across her generous hips; another floral swathe struggled to contain her sizeable breasts. "Dear Princess, we present to you our sons. Please choose whoever pleases you." As the woman spoke, her eyebrows danced, her eyes grew round and wide, and her nose flared as wide as her large mouth. TigerLily, captivated by this woman's facial dancing, remained still and quiet, offering no reply to the woman's statement. Before she knew it, the young boys began lining up before her. The first was a scrawny boy of five years; his skin was scorched to a crispy coffee-color, bland brown hair hung about his big brown eyes uncoiled. Without saying a word he bowed and kissed her lips.

The boy's lips were still on the princess when Ali'ioaiga burst through the shack's flimsy door. "What is the meaning of this!? Step away from the girl, boy!" His massive arm shoved the boy off the porch. Stepping in front of the princess, the angry guard stood glaring

at the villagers, eyebrows arching out from the knot above his long flared nose, legs spread, arm muscles tense, gripping his deadly *fā'alaufa'i*². “Wicked women! Take your filthy miscreants before I kill ‘em all!” The villagers scattered like vermin.

Ali'ioaiga grabbed the little princess and tossed her over his shoulder, ignoring her shrieking and kicking. TigerLily screamed and struggled against the guard's grip to no avail. He had her. Sleep took her once more as she hung upside-down from his shoulder, bobbing along until they reached the Chief's fale.

Then TigerLily was rudely awakened when her guard flung her before *Nofoagatoto'a*. “Aue! How dare you treat the Princess so disrespectfully!”

Ali'ioaiga scowled. “She snuck into the village. I found her cavorting with the sons of your enemies. I got to her before she could be tainted by them.”

The Chief's face became flushed. With wide, troubled eyes he stared at his only daughter still crumpled on the floor before him. With a low, gentle voice he spoke, “Daughter. It saddens me to hear this. Your safety and virtue is important to me, and to the future of our village. Therefore, I must do what is best for all.”

By the next morning a smaller fale was erected on the south-side of the Chief's fale; only three-hundred feet in circumference with nine wooden columns. Thatched woven shades of coconut leaves hung closed between each column, keeping out the outside world. Elaborate *tapa* draped from the ceiling and lay across the floor. The only color other than brown came from the orangey-red *teuila*³ that adorned each post.

So it was near the end of her fourth year that Princess TigerLily was confined to this fale. *Aliamanaia* and *Saute* took turns guarding the girl, always suspicious of the girl's potential to sneak away. The guards kept her on constant watch; the only privacy the little princess received was with her maids, and even then a guard was always three feet away with his back turned. Her days and nights were spent within the fale. TigerLily saw and spoke to no one, save for her father and mother who occasionally visited her; silence and solitude were her constant companions.

Eight years passed and as TigerLily neared the brink of womanhood, the little fale began closing in on her. The blushing color of the *teuila* had finally begun to fade in her eyes. She needed more—more light, more color, more freedom, more space. One day, while

² Samoan War Club

³ A kind of ginger flower

Saute was on guard, the young princess began to weep. Never had she cried before, but the years of confinement had finally taken their toll. She wept and wailed, cursing all that surrounded her and all who confined her.

Not knowing how to handle the situation and unable to ignore the girl's anguish, Saute, for the first time in all his years of service, left his post. He found three maids, Tausalalalei, Masina and Mekana, and brought them to attend to the girl. The girl was still a crumpled, crying mess when the four arrived, and nothing they did eased her agony.

After three hours of TigerLily's wailing, Saute became impatient. His eyes squinted and his cheekbones flayed out while he scraped the back of his ear in frustration. Finally, Tausalalalei ordered him to leave. "Nofoagatoto'a will be here soon. He can't see her like this. Hurry, leave! Your presence is only making her worse."

With much resistance from the princess, the three maids cleaned her as best they could. By the time Nofoagatoto'a arrived, TigerLily's tears had finally ceased. Still, the remaining swollen redness rimming her eyelids rivaled the red of the teuila. She sat in the center of the fale, staring dejectedly at the man who imprisoned her. "Father, I can no longer live like this. I understand it's for my protection, but I must insist on protection based on my terms. Refuse, and there will be nothing left to protect. I swear on the spirit of Nafanua⁴. You can protect me from everything except myself. I'll do more harm to your precious daughter than any of your enemies."

It then slowly dawned on the aged Chief that his deep affection had suffocated the child. His love was too little and too much; it wasn't enough to sustain her in the fale, yet too much of it had impaired her ability to love anyone, including herself. Fearing what the princess intended to do to herself, Nofoagatoto'a could do nothing but let Princess TigerLily have what she wished. She was given her own island, Motu Aualava⁵, of infinite color and space. Mekana and Masina were ordered to look after her.

Word of TigerLily's move to Motu Aualava drifted along the tops of the coconut palms until the whole village knew. Despite his realization of his encumbering love, Nofoagatoto'a couldn't let his only daughter leave with no possibility of returning. As soon as TigerLily began her journey to the distant island, the Chief sent out a decree: Any man that is able to gain the love of Princess TigerLily and return her to me (and she must return willingly), to him I will relinquish my title.

By the time Princess TigerLily reached Motu Aualava, scores of canoes filled with young island men paddled their way towards her. The intentions of these men were greedy and impure. TigerLily mattered very little to them; the title her hand promised was all they desired. Fortunately for the princess (but unfortunately for the men), the spirit of Motu Aualava and the waters that surrounded the island followed the spirit of its young ruler. Once upon the island, Princess TigerLily caused the waves to cease rolling towards Motu Aualava.

Yea and many were driven, until they were scattered on the waters on the west, and on the north. Others reached the island where they became lost in the wilderness, which was called Vaoalili; and the wilderness was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.

And it came to pass that many died in the wilderness of their wounds, and were devoured by those beasts and also the vultures of the air; and their bones have been heaped up on the earth.⁶

And it came to pass that on her first day upon the island, Princess TigerLily erected a great wall that bordered Vaoalili by which she dwelt. And the wall had many layers of wood and ore; and the wild beasts surrounded the wall and the vultures circled awaiting their next meal.

For nine wonderful years TigerLily lived happily, safely behind her wall, protected from the greed of men. None could enter her solace for the wall had no entrance. The pleasures of the island were for the enjoyment of the three women alone. Their days were spent in quiet communion with the island spirits. They ate from the trees where an abundance of fruit grew. Sweet nectars and tantalizing koko beans clouded TigerLily's memory of the lonely pain she felt as a child.

And then the wall came tumbling down...

Masina and Mekana were the first to hear the wall fall. Princess TigerLily remained oblivious to its destruction until the destroyer stood before her. Tall and sinewy, his skin bronzed and full lips chapped from the long journey. His distinguished features didn't possess the harshness typical of the men from TigerLily's village. He also lacked the bulky flesh her island men carried. Yet, his strength and power was unmistakable. A rock had demolished her wall.

⁶ Alma 2:37-38

And it came to pass that all this was done by Ma'a⁷, yea by the hands of Ma'a did the wall crumble. Yea, the face of Ma'a, the hands of Ma'a, the entire being of Ma'a, how beautiful were they to the eyes of she who there came to the knowledge of Love.⁸

Not since that day she snuck into the village had Princess TigerLily been so vulnerable. Her wall was down, and there stood before her a man capable of capturing and crushing her heart.

Ma'a believed he had drifted onto the island by chance. But it was the spirit of the island that sent the waves to pull him in and caused the wild beasts to take no notice of him. And as for the wall, he destroyed it himself—an impossible feat for the other men that tried and died before him. He barely touched it before it crumbled. He hadn't expected to find anyone behind it. Yet there she was before him, long dark hair curling past full hips, full lashes framing slanted brown eyes, cheeks burning red against her caramel complexion.

TigerLily found herself torn. The urge to retreat behind her two maids overwhelmed her. But even while hiding behind them, she noticed that his gaze remained on her. Her pathetic heart fluttered; she lowered her eyes, sticking her lip out, confused.

Before TigerLily could be completely lost in her thoughts, the wise maids turned to the princess and said, "Now we know that thou art desirous to possess the love that thou doth not possess; Yea, and are ready to suffer the sufferance of love. Now we say unto you, if this be the desire of your heart, what have you against this man loving thee?⁹ We perceive him to be of pure intentions. Wherefore, thou hath no need to fear him."

Ma'a then proceeded to move closer to the young princess, the maids moving aside, preparing to leave the two alone. As Ma'a came closer, Mekana pushed TigerLily toward him before running off with Masina. The sudden thrust caused TigerLily to stumble forward into Ma'a's arms. Looking up into his dark and honest eyes, wrapped in his warmth and strength, she finally found the unshackled security and assurance she had always desired.

And so began the love of Princess TigerLily and Ma'a. And it came to pass that we all returned to the land of her birth on the waves from Motu Aualava. And Nofogatoto'a was pleased. Yea, and how blessed are we, and we shall sing to Ma'a's praise forever. O oe o le ma'a na fa'afuagalu.¹⁰

⁷ Meaning "rock"

^{8,9} Mosiah 18

¹⁰ Samoan proverb literally translated as:
You are the rock that brings the waves.

Living in Color

Kiley Bishop



First Recital-Appause

Mari Murdock

It's the dance of the claps

The click clack of happy hands

Keys.

It's never,

Not ever,

About the keys.

It's the dance of the claps.

Always...

Before.

You cringe in your clothes

Your throat bottles.

The drumming beat,

The boom

boom of the room!

Sitting next to silence

Tingling.

The shakes.

After.

After,

Slinking and sliding on supercilious

After.

It's about the keys.

It's the dance of the claps.

You sweat storms of sick thoughts.

That don't hide your shaking.

Your tongue ticks along to

Fear in your feet.

Boom

Sleeping beside your skin

Waiting.

But then
You begin
The keys.

Up.
Music Music

Down.
Over and over and over.
Summer and birds and
Musical musical musical

Then.
Slowing low to stop,
The warmth of the room

You bow.

The click

It's the dance of the claps
After the keys

Not ever
About the keys

But then
You play.
Those keys!

Down.

Music!
Up!
Under and under and under.
Winter and walking

Music.
Hush...

The cool of the room,

After.

The clack

After the fear
It's never,

About the keys.

Time, You Fickle Little Thief

Vasu Chetty

Time, You Fickle Little thief;
Taking what's not yours,
So that now it is unfindable.
I look amid the shadows,
Search beneath the sand,
Explore the depths of the ocean,
But I can't find it anywhere.

A clever little nymph you are,
So sly and so conniving.
Devious to the very end,
I must applaud your cunning.
I run around in circles,
But I'm chasing my own tale.
It's a never-ending busqueda for what I lost.

Then I realize your little trick.
All that wasted time!
I was searching for more time to use,
And I used more time in searching.
You snide and arrogant devil, you.
You wretched, foul filled creature.
How blind I've been just sitting here.

I understand much better now,
I've forgotten all about you.
I've lost myself in doing now;
Not searching like before.
I'm doing what I wanted to.
You can't stop me now, for sure.
I've won, you've lost and that is that.

But wait again, oh bother.
I've lost some more, where has it gone?
I need, no must, find more.
But to start the search would cause more pain;
Suffering I cannot bear.
To find again, what you have stolen.
Oh Time, you fickle thief.

Day I Woke Up Ecstatic

Cassandra Chen



Signs

Greg Steele



Character Building

Nate Stout

Being a child of a low-income family that wants to further my education, I have been forced at times to accept less-than desirable jobs. Not for a day at a time like Mike Rowe, but for however long as I have between semesters. This isn't always the most appealing of summer activities, picking up whichever job I can find within a week of graduating high school or returning from a university, but I like to think that if I choose to skip these jobs now and miss out on school, I'll have to work in one of these hell-on-earth jobs as a career which is even worse. At least this way I can look forward to the end of summer, otherwise I'd be looking forward to...nothing. My dad always said "It builds character" but I think he meant "It builds characters," because out of the jobs I have worked as a student, I have met some of the strangest people ever created by the man upstairs.

For example, my first job, that is, my first taxed income, was at the local Subway, about a 10 minute walk from my house which is perfect for a young gun without a license. The only crappy part was working on Fridays when all my friends came in and laughed at the new sandwich artist making sandwiches for everyone that was going to see *The Italian Job*, to make out in a dark air-conditioned theater. Then there was always working late nights, as I am locking the doors and the drunk homeless guys come up and ask if I have any extra food and beg to use the bathroom. As if I'm not running a restaurant that is open everyday of the year. Do they honestly think that we get deliveries everyday and use exactly that much food every single day? Plus, I still have to clean up all the footprints that are now on my freshly mopped floor and go check the bathrooms for crossfire marks and then go home without getting cited for being out past curfew and awake before my dad so he can take me to seminary in less than six and a half hours.

That isn't the worst part of the job either. The worst part is when you get the 40 something immigrant, legal or not, that is baked out of his mind order the biggest sandwich with triple the meat, double cheese and as many veggies as I can roll up in the lame

and inconveniently-shaped sandwich wrapper. Then, after asking for payment, with the line all jammed up behind him he opens 2 bags of chips, asks for the “biggest f***ing cup you got” and downs a liter and a half of a Diet Pepsi before throwing down a wrinkled five and saying “That’s too much.” while running out of the store. Of course it’s too much because no human smaller than a Shamu/Mo’Nique lovechild would ever eat that much in less than a week. *It builds character Nate.* But customers are only the half of it. You still have the whole staff that you work with everyday. Every place has the emo/suicidal/goth kid, the nerd who wants a good reference for her resume, the cool kid just doing this “to build character”, the potheads that are only there to pay for their weed until they start growing their own and the oversized kid because they want free Subway and management is going for the quota of overweight guys on staff. Also, there is one or more of the following, the weird hippie that smells like stroganoff, the alcoholic high school senior with way too much money and or the tall, Ludacris looking pimp that has to work here or his parents will take his car, which I’m surprised hasn’t been taken by DEQ for its “visible emissions” or at least ticketed for the sound system that only a shuttle launching can drown out. I’m pretty sure this isn’t the type of character that my parents want me to develop. Something tells me that tokin’ up while taking out the trash or disappearing on my break with a footlong and my baby mama is just a little different than the vision that my old man held in such high regard. Plus, you always have to get the feminazi boss whose only reason for hiring you is because your brother used to tutor her in math class. Of course when you put in your resignation -which is way too fancy a word for quitting a grunt-level position at a franchise fast-food chain by the way- so that you can focus on graduating high school she takes it to mean that you are a terrible worker and that you don’t care enough for the team work environment that they have developed here with the company. It’s too bad that on the resignation sheet they don’t have enough space for comments such as, I’m only a part-time student worker so I can’t continue working 35 hours a week or, please stop calling me to cover for 3 workers at once, or even, When I say I can’t work Sundays I mean I can’t work on Sunday not Call me Sunday every week after you mess up the scheduling. *It builds character Nate. It sure does! A character of a people hating teenager that will not be able to set foot into a Subway for a year and a half due to the nausea that would follow and cannot say hello to a person without saying “What kind of bread would you like?”*

Subway was interesting to say the least but it cannot compare to the employment endeavor I refer to as "the lost years." What's weird about said pet name is the fact that I only was in this line of work for three weeks. Temp work. Wow. I can't tell you how fun it is to work with different people everyday. Don't get me wrong, it's nice to get a different task every day, moving industrial garage doors all day one day, building a retaining wall the next, erecting a second floor out of mezzanine and warehouse shelving on the third, and the smoking breaks for a non-smoker are straight off-the-chain! (no pun intended), but have you seen some of these freaks? I mean, here I am, a weak sauce little college first year working with a cocaine addict with a motor mouth and some NASCAR wannabe with a suped up Daewoo complete with beer bong, naked chick mud flaps and lack of license. But then you have the dude who's been out of work for seventeen months with a kid and a wife and a 54 year-old uber-conservative with only a bus pass, a small apartment and a super-ignorant pro-Bush rant to his name. Not only am I extremely uncomfortable in the downtown warehouses that I am sent to work in but I feel terrible wearing my Converse All Stars and brand new Levi's while taking a potential job from a starving parent? Talk about a guilt trip when you go on your first break and complain about the weight of the last unit that you had to move and you realize that another guy would do it silently for half the pay without a lunch break. *It builds character Nate. I never thought that that character would be begging to break back into the fast food business...*

The only way out of this never ending wheel of eternal company hopping is getting interviews with only the elite of companies. Places like...Blockbuster, Albertson's or, my personal favorite; Chevron, a place of opportunity. Like an opportunity to not only get high for free but get paid for it. Can life get better? I submit that it cannot! Unfortunately for me these places aren't that appreciative of a 6' 5" featherweight with a center of gravity that is precariously high and oh, can't work Sundays or Mondays. When you put that down on an application you're pretty much slamming the door to any STD, drug or alcohol free environments. Seriously, I'm shocked God himself didn't descend from heaven and tell my parents he would rather have me work on Sundays than go to some of the available jobs falling under the umbrella of an honor-code abiding student on vacation. *It builds character Nate. The character of an in debt college child that can now fill out a job application in under 60 seconds, always has a blue or black pen on his person and absolutely hates everything about anyone with*

a desk. I did eventually did find a decent waged job but it was in an area focused on an area of work that myself as pretty much a glorified skin-covered skeleton am not very skilled in. A genre called: manual labor. I hate manual labor. With a passion. I truly believe that it is called manual labor because a guy named Manuel invented and/or only Manuel and friends will do it for less than 20 bucks an hour. Unfortunately, this is exactly why there are always openings in said companies during the summer when college kids return home for a break. Really the only break these kids get over the summer is a break in their back from carting hundreds of pounds of debris and manure to and from backyards of overly rich wine-os while making sure to watch the paint on the oversized SUV's parked way too far to one side on their driveway located directly in front of the only passage to their stadium-sized backyards. "Hey Nate, can you give up me the chainsaw hijo?"

"First off Jose, I'm not your hijo and second, no I can't because that chainsaw is 6 feet long and weighs as much as a pregnant walrus, not to mention you are 15 feet above my head. Throw me a fricking rope or something."

"Can't you jump? You muy alto hijo."

"No way Jose. Wow, that actually applies here! And once again allow me to emphasize, not your hijo."

Upon arriving home, I have to find the lye soap, which smells like it came straight out of a gay pride magazine, to attempt to remove the sap from my entire body. Then I take a trip to the store to restock my first aid kit which has already been deplete since I bought it last week due to the infinity number of scrapes, scratches and open wounds resulting from dragging innumerable limbs and brush piles and shoving them into a chipper that is big enough to grind me. [Note to self, if I ever become a serial killer I will utilize this machine to rid myself of evidence, making sure to mind the noise ordinances of whichever county I am in at the time.]

Working with illegal Mexicans is like drinking milk a day after it expires, not really bad most of the time but it scares the hell out of you because of the slight possibility that you may be arrested for aiding and abetting an alien. They're not even scary guys if you know Spanish. It's like when you go into a KinderCare and the kids all run up to you and are like "Goo goo, gah gah, lalalala" and you don't understand them but after a while you get a handle on spreken the deutche of the kids, you get that all they really want is someone to change their diapers.

Mexicans just want someone to be the butt of their jokes. Then they become the butt of your jokes when you say "Callete senior. Tu mama es una ducha." They are shocked into silence for a few days but after that, they accept you into their little Spanglish fold and you make fun of the other ignorant passersbys on the sidewalk. I think that whoever makes up words should meet with Mr. Webster and discuss changing the synonym for landscaping from manual labor to "learn Spanish curse words labor." It's more accurate because it seems there are more Joses and Juans than Manuels and hey, where else are you gonna be learning the 17 different ways to describe a hot woman while trimming a hedge? *So this is the character that it develops. A racist sounding, lame pun telling, pro illegal immigrant prick?*

Man, if only my pops read this now, he'd probably call up Christopher Lloyd or Speilberg to get a hold of the DeLorean, send me back to Sophomore year of high school and give me a grand to invest. It requires more utilization of my academic learning, can be done from the comfort of my own home so no need to fret about the lack of license it's easier and safer, not to mention the character that it builds. I'm thinking a heartless bigot with no regard to anyone but himself. But a rich bigot that still has clean lungs and mind, a scar free body and a debt-free four years of further education and a model for a girlfriend. *It builds character Nate. Character that only a mother could love. Or Satan.*

Kensington Church Street

Greg Steele



Soda Kills

Erika Kuta

Seventy-two blue capsules were in the first bottle and fifteen and a half white pellets were in the bottle next to it. She thought about it for a moment, and she came to the conclusion that the combined effects of the bottles wouldn't kill her. "Blast," she thought as she continued to rummage through the dresser drawer in her Dad's room for other discarded medicines. What Dekan didn't realize is the combination of the pills would have finished her off quicker than a squirrel in a bug zapper. But she didn't even reconsider that they would do the job as she searched for another container. She gave up after another forty-four seconds because no one in the house had ever had the courtesy to catch a disease that would require something, which she would recognize as lethal. However, Dekan would never kill herself she was just fascinated with the process that would lead to death. Bottles still in hand she left the room located in the basement of the split level house. Muttering to herself she wandered up the stairs, onto the landing, and up the next flight of stairs; crossed the living room and proceeded down the hall which lead into her room.

Fifty-five seconds later, Joe was standing outside the house on the black cracked asphalt driveway, staring at the stark white house with Californian lime green trim. He wondered what Dekan's parents had been thinking with their color choices, the house was in contrast to the blues, creams and browns that dominated the neighborhood. He opened a bottle of soda with his teeth, a terrible habit that he had developed in high school. Joe's thoughts trailed to the past, high school was the first social setting they, meaning Joe and Dekan, had interacted in. Joe sitting at a study table was reading the first book that had ever bothered to try and gain his attention. Lost in a world of dragons and griffins, he didn't notice the skinny shadow creeping past the bookshelves in the library. Dekan was approaching like a homicidal jungle cat; she pounced on the chair across from Joe, and didn't even bother to ask if it was alright to occupy it, however the chair didn't mind at all. An instant

bond was formed between Joe and Dekan, over the things that truly mattered in life, Sunday morning comics, science fiction, anything generally disregarded by the rest of the student body, was cherished and honored by these two. When high school graduation came it was a celebrated relief, and college in a distant land was planned. Their initial encounter had happened seven years ago.

Joe walked into Dekan's house and followed the same route that Dekan had taken, to get to her room; opening the door to Dekan's room he snatched the pills away from her. "I'm not actually going through with it." And at the moment Dekan said it she meant it. Glancing at the soda in Joe's hand it caused a reaction in Dekan, with a heavy exaggerated sigh it caused her to say, "You know that's going to kill you." Dekan was referring to the soda, which Joe always had on hand.

Joe consumed about three liters of carbonated beverage with caffeine, everyday. He drank soda like he should drink water. Other than this unhealthy obsession with his sugary skank, Joe was in good health. As always he ignored Dekan's warning and started to watch a line of ants cross underneath the windowsill and into the electric socket. He wondered whether they were heading home or out to forage.

Dekan interrupted his thoughts with a question, "So you know what I watched today?" Joe hated this game but humored her. She always asked this question and it was always the last thing he suggested. "A movie? A play? The dissection of a cockroach by ants?" his thoughts had returned to the six-legged fiends.

"How did you know? On the kitchen floor I saw him, he must have passed away during the night, or so I thought. What was disturbing was when I realized he was being devoured alive. At first I thought the ants were just moving the antenna, when I realized he was twitching. When I saw the legs moving that I figured out he was still alive." Shuddering as she made the last comment, she then flicked away an ant that had managed to scout up onto Joe's neck. Stating the obvious she said, "Hmm that shouldn't be there. If I'm not careful they may get me while I'm sleeping." A strange silence entered Dekan's room, she wasn't fond of it. "Let's go watch something. I need to get out of the house for a while and I leave it up to you to decide." Dekan looked at Joe with riveted anticipation. Joe thought for a moment, the image came to mind of the dirty laundry that was creeping out of his laundry basket and making a

break for the door. Knowing that Dekan was not referring to a movie or something normal, he pitched the following, "Umm, well, I have to do my laundry." Bouncing off the bed and dancing round the room Dekan chanted, "Laundry! Laundry! Laundry!" Watching clothes go through the washing machine and dryer were one of Dekan's favorite past times. They left Dekan's and headed over to Joe's. Here an alarm clock without fail always flashed the wrong time and the garbage can was overflowing with rubbish that belonged to everyone but him. He grabbed his dirty laundry and they headed for the Laundromat.

Dekan enjoyed watching the clothes tumble in the dryer; the best part about it all was that the dryer was a kaleidoscope she didn't have to turn or put up to the light. She started assigning different clothes as thoughts or anything else that had happened to pass through her mind at the moment. At that instant a shrinking giraffe, summer vacation and a cornucopia of awkward moments were tumbling through the dryer. Eight hundred and forty seconds later she noticed Joe had sat down and started to read. He was currently three hundred and forty two pages into a rather thick and obnoxious looking book, just like the book Joe had first been reading when he met Dekan, this one demanded his attention. Dekan started counting the seconds down until the final load in the dryer was done "239, 238, 237, 236, 235, 234..."

"So it begins," sighed Joe rolling his gaze up to the ceiling and back to his page.

She continued, "147, 146, 145, 144, 143..."

"This is me ignoring you," he stated, while losing his place.

Continuing on she reeled off, "121, 120, 119, 118"

"Quit it!" aggravated he closed the book and folded his arms turning from her.

With a smirk in her voice she placed her head on his shoulder as she listed these, "99, 98, 97, 96..."

Dekan didn't understand formulas and the numbers that cause them to function; they were much like Joe. The concept of following a formula was something Dekan just didn't grasp, she acknowledged that they existed but couldn't quite figure out how they worked, hence her fascination. Joe was methodical, his life was formulated to produce the exact results he wanted in any given situation. Dekan with her lack of ability to understand cause and effect, had entered

herself into an equation, which would eliminate her from his life. Little did she know, she was on the verge of losing her dear, interesting friend and all because of a simple equation.

Once the laundry was completed and deposited safely back on Joe's bed. They went to Joe's place of work. He was a Shelver at the biggest library in the county. He spent hours putting back books on the shelves, cursing Dewey and his classification system. While at work he spent his time pushing around his literary companions on an orange trolley. Enjoying the quiet, he put everything in its place. He felt at home in the literary sections, these were the subjects listed as 700-900 these held his interest, and rested on the top floor of the library. This is where the inklings dwelt and Orson Scott Card resides, Poe's Red Death slid between the shelves, and games of Calvinball were never ending. On these shelves modernism and postmodern prose stood side by side. They all reached an accord no matter what opinion they had; all had a place and a purpose even Joe. He almost felt at the end of the day he belonged upon the shelf amongst the society of these classic works, then the world in which he lived.

Today however was not a day for labor. Even on his days off you could find Joe at the library. The conditions of the day were conducive to reading. The barometer had dropped a couple of points indicating an approaching rainstorm. Even Dekan's normal attempts of distraction would not faze him today. He had in his mind a list of all the books he had to read before he could no longer function, and with the exception of one, he had read all the ones that he felt were worth the time or effort. That last book was now being carried in his hands.

Dekan just liked to watch him read, the only thing she enjoyed more was when she was able to get him to put the book down. As far as she was aware she was the only one that took on such a daunting task. The book that Joe was carrying today actually looked interesting. Dekan grabbed at the book and for the first time got it away from Joe an event that had never happened before in their friendship. Opening the book and beginning in the epilogue she began to read. Joe ignored her for the moment, but the tension building in his jaw indicated a different sentiment.

They walked past the busted soda machine, which was a cantankerous old thing blotched with rust, it should have been retired in eighty-four. It had a unique structure as it was the only

machine in the area which stood on four legs which propped the machine three inches from the floor. It had the desire to walk away but was lacking the joints and the height that this would require. Even if it did have the joints this would be a difficult task as it had only three legs the fourth being replaced by a tarnished turquoise book; containing the complete works of Ambrose Bierce which was only one millimeter off being the perfect height for a replacement leg. Joe had damaged the leg; the machine had made the error of not dispensing Joe's bottle of soda, as a vending machine should. He had kicked the machine promptly in the leg and it fell on its side. Dekan was with him at the time and grabbed the closest book in range. Joe caught the machine and while he balanced it, Dekan orchestrated the replacement of the machine's equilibrium. Together they had shifted the machine back to its original position against the wall. The turquoise book held the weight in a proud manner and as no one had bothered to read it, it was left feeling grateful just to have a sense of purpose. The machine was filled every Tuesday and provided Joe's cold caffeinated beverages while he was about his duties. With the amount of soda that Joe consumed at work the cans left in the rubbish were enough to feed the three ant colonies that had made their homes throughout the nearby grounds, one of these being at the base of the bus stop where Joe and Dekan were heading.

As they waited for the bus the rain started to fall, in thick heavy sheets, the rain wouldn't stop, drowning the obscure bus stop, made of Plexiglas which Joe and Dekan occupied. Dusk had just fallen and the lampposts flickered to life. The light caught the silhouette of the rain falling on the walls of the bus stop, making every object inside appear to be slipping away. Dekan had curled up on the corner of the bus bench, reading the book that Joe had just acquired. Trying to find a tone that would not display the animosity that he felt building towards Dekan, he said, "I'd like that back now."

She looked up for a brief moment to say, "You're melting." Looking down at the khaki fibers that made her pants, globs of them also appeared to be running away. The rain sputtered to a stop prompting Dekan to stand, she stood poised on the curb, playing at not being able to balance with Joe's book in hand. At that moment the bus was about forty-five seconds away and as it came around the corner the book dropped from Dekan's hand into a puddle exactly three inches deep. As Dekan went to reach for it the bus pulled up and the rear wheel was squarely on the cover of the book.

Dekan was wondering what it would've been like if the bus had hit her, as Joe walked away from the bus stop without a word.

Three weeks, four days, and five hours has passed since the event occurred, Dekan was now in the process of trying to convince herself to start the day at a reasonable hour. Like a grey whale she breached out of bed and then fell right back in amongst the covers. While the world continued to rotate around her, Dekan's thoughts kept drifting to the brown paper parcel sitting on the dark coffee table in the living room. It had been there for a week. It was the one thing Dekan needed to do but had found any and all other excuses to do something else.

Her parents had been renting out the family home for a couple of years now. Tired of the cutting Midwest winters, soaked with cold from over the years, they had opted for a sun stroked, dehydrated habitation in the desert; where they could dry out for a while. Leaving Dekan with one charge, to maintain the house, yard and collect the rent.

Stumbling out of bed and across the floor to the bathroom she turned on the shower but went to the sink to brush her teeth. The noise from the shower kept her roommates out of the bathroom. The other line of defense she utilized was pulling out the bottom bathroom drawer that would stop the door from opening at a quarter of an inch, her current roommates had a terrible habit of walking into the bathroom unannounced, she would have locked the door, but the lock had been broken. It stood as a memorial to an epic battle of why you should never borrow a younger sister's favorite article of clothing without asking.

Dressing with no particular event in mind she headed down the stairs and into the garage heading to the back. She passed the banana yellow nineteen seventy-six mercury cougar "One of these days I'm going to get that running." She stated this as fact but she had been saying so for ten years. Past the corrugated brown boxes which formed dusty towers. They held Christmas trees, her dad's high school memories and other relics that had not seen the light of day for some time. If you looked up into the faded rafters, there lay plastic sleds which had carved winter memories in the backyard, of frozen appendages and fortress's of ice, winter wasn't far off but these had slept along time.

She grabbed a Phillips head screwdriver from where her Mother kept the tools. Slipping out from beneath the garage door

which was always three feet from the ground, she had to hunch over and crawl out. Crossing to the side yard she chose a spot with plenty of work to do, systematically she started ending the lives of dandelions, using the screwdriver to pry out the taproot of the plant. One being a particular snot, she had to sit down cross-legged on the grass that felt like it wasn't there; as she dug she could hear the ground giving way.

To her right there were five apple trees battered with time, two plum trees one was in the process of rotting from the inside out. A crab apple tree was perched over a drainage outlet in the back yard. The tree appeared to be peering into the drain; here Dekan's childhood monsters now lived. With time they had been run out from underneath the bed, closets and other dark corners being replaced by the fears that make an adult. While Dekan was trying not to think of Joe, Joe was in the process of removing her particle by particle from his memory.

Joe over the past three weeks had been erasing Dekan from his life. The destruction of the book was what did her in. As far as he was concerned he didn't even realize she annoyed him, until it had happened. Places that held any sort of place that held a memory of the two of them he found other people to be there with, as he created new memories, Thoughts of Dekan were exterminated without hesitation, and a happy haze of ignorance passed his face if she was mentioned. That was just the way it was, even when she walked into his room put a brown parcel on his bed, her shadow didn't even have a chance to linger as she left. Inside the package was the copy of the book, which she had destroyed, signed by the author. When Joe bothered to look, he said to himself out loud, "Still doesn't change what happened."

Dekan wandered past the community park with the pond full of leeches, to be honest she had not quite come to terms with what she had done wrong. Unsure of where she was going and why she had bothered to go over to Joe's without apologizing for at least destroying the book. The same patterns of thought, when she did bother to think about the book were crossing through her mind, "He could have said something, even if she hadn't. The book couldn't be that important could it?" out of frustration she muttered out loud, "All he ever does is read..." At that moment it came to light just how important reading was to Joe. "Crap!" she uttered the phrase just as a elderly women who was walking home from

confession passed, glancing back the woman wondered what had caused the young lady to use such language.

A couple hours later Dekan walked into the library searching all four levels finding Joe by the broken soda machine. She uttered, "So" unaware of where to start. Joe moved away from the soda machine ignoring her. He wondered, "What made her think giving me a book would make everything go back to normal?" He was still upset. She caught his attention with the following babbling statement, "I didn't realize how important that book was until after I left your house today. I can be a little oblivious and well..." The sentence tripped and fell as she noted that Joe continued to walk away. He was perfectly aware of Dekan's faults; he just couldn't deal with it anymore. "I came to apologize, and you certainly aren't making it easy," out of frustration she kicked The collection of Ambrose Bierce stories. The book tried to maintain its post but began to slip out from beneath the machine. Joe started to chuckle, "Now you've gone too far!" Following in step with the humor which Dekan preferred to the silence "Well for good measure I'll do it again!" she smiled as she kicked the vending machine one more time. The machine at this point couldn't take the abuse and without thought fell on top of Dekan, taking away her words, leaving her still.

Joe wasn't quite sure what had happened, for once Dekan was in serious peril, and he managed to tilt the machine off her. The force of moving it abruptly again made the machine purge its contents, many of the bottle's hitting Dekan in the head. "I thought soda was going to kill me." He thought, as he checked for a pulse. In three seconds he was going to start CPR but she started to breathe again. When she was able to formulate a sentence she stated, "Ok enough death for one night." Laughing her way through the pain, and indicating to one of the bottles on the floor she managed to spill out the statement, "I'm thirsty." Joe grabbed two sodas, from the floor and handed one to Dekan. He went to open the soda in his usual matter as Dekan stated, "Careful that'll probably kill you." When she had said soda would kill him he laughed, and then choked on the bottle cap.

When I am a Husband and Father

Drew Mierzejewski

When I am a husband/father I shall wear flannel
With jeans and grow a beard that my wife will hate
At which time I will shave it off
Only to find that she really did like it and grow a new one
And then hear tirades on my unkempt look
And shave it and thus the cycle continues.
I will take my kids to hardware stores
Leaving just when their favorite show begins
And returning home just after the show ends.
I will take my kids camping in torrential freezing rain
And wade through knee high mud and when they ask me why
I will say "it builds character of course".
I will give my youngest everything he wants,
Sleep in my eldest son's bed when he doesn't come home to 2 am,
Let my middle child think he is the favorite and let him make all his
own decisions,
And yet love them all equally so much it hurts,
Even though they say I don't.

I will adore my wife and buy her flowers "just because",
Name a star after her on our anniversary,
Leave her little notes around the house before I go to work saying how
lucky I was she chose me,
And buy that new washer, or dryer, or car or whatever she wants for
her birthday
Even though she says we can't afford it (which we can't).

But now I must go to school to learn and be successful,
And go on a mission to become that father you read about in the New
Era,
And find a job to feed and clothe and care for that future wife and kids.
We must date and search and scrimp and save until we find "The One".

But in the end it might all be just a dream of white picket fences
And perfect homes where bread is made fresh daily
And wives and husbands never stop loving each other
And children always behave and love their parents.
But maybe, just maybe it isn't a dream, well not all of it anyway
And one day I might wake up, go to my closet and realize that today...
Today I shall wear flannel!

Wisdom

Aissa Carreon



Lake Creek

Jennifer Chidester

We pulled up in front of the brick house and I felt sick; the road through the canyons had been long. The leathery old man emerged from the shade of the garage and pushed back the trucker's hat on his head. Brothers and sisters scrambled out of the car at full tilt, yelled, "Grandpa!" and launched themselves at him. He walked over to my Dad and clapped him on the shoulder. "Take off your hat, Steve, I want to see the gray in your hair." Dad pulled off his ball cap to reveal still red hair. They both laughed until Dad paused with arms extended. Grandpa patted his shoulder and turned to me.

I walked carefully, and tried to swallow the salty wet in my mouth. Grandpa's light eyes sparkled, "you look 'bout ready to ralph like a dog, Jefinner." He always called me that. It came from my older sister, who was two when I was born and couldn't say Jennifer. I don't ever remember him using my real name. I wanted my Dad, but Grandpa intercepted me. He picked me up in a tight squeeze and when he set me down, I blinked up at him for a second before doubling over to throw up. I came up crying with sick down my front. He laughed and said, "I'll get the hose."

When I was little I didn't like going over to Grandpa's house. I pretended I did, because Dad did, and I wanted to love everything my Dad loved. I would search every part of myself for my father and where I didn't find him; I'd create something to pull us closer. I learned his stories. I practiced writing with my left hand like him and speaking French, so Mom and the others wouldn't understand. I knew the words to every Eagles song and ate anything he offered me.

When I was three or four, Dad and I would go out to the garden to pick hot turnips out of the soil. He'd wipe one till the red showed and bite it in half. I'd hold my hands out for the rest of the root, and my lips would burn with expectancy. If tears welled up, I bent down and squeezed my eyes shut, while my fingers found the next turnip. By the time I had another one ready for Dad to brush off, I could swallow and smile.

But I could not swallow and smile the trips to Grandpa's house. I should have been able to as I walked down those hallways of my father's childhood. I tried to see him there, short and freckled and climbing out his bedroom window at night or taking photographs of mossy headstones in the cemetery behind the house. All I saw was the boxes of junk shunted into the bedroom and the new chain fence surrounding the graveyard. The orange shag carpet and pea soup couch in Grandpa's living room made me feel carsick again, but that was better than the glass eyed stuffed pheasant in the dining room. But up at Lake Creek, out on the water, I could see why Dad loved going home.

Grandpa always said the plot of land belonged to the three of them, but it didn't really. Grandma had left for Salt Lake years ago and Dad was a lawyer in California. But when we made it up to Heber every few years, the two of them liked to pretend that nothing had changed. And if Dad wanted to pretend, so did I. On the map the hills above Heber are labeled Lake Creek. But once we hit Heber City limits, Dad's accent came back. So taking the cue from him, in my mind the trout stocked pond a couple miles up the road, behind the No Trespassing sign was called "Lay Crick".

The others always wanted to stay home, but I never missed a chance to fish at "Lake Creek". Dad would bundle me up and let me carry one of the poles. I had the best luck of any fisher "person" they knew, I was often told. While Dad checked if he needed to replace the salt licks, Grandpa would set me up. Dad is strictly a fly fisherman, so that's what I wanted to be too. He would unreel some line for slack and pull the pole back, pause, and whip the line forward until he got the fly to lay just where he wanted. Grandpa set a hook with a worm, or cheese, or corn and cast it out for me, before he got out his own fly rod. I grumbled until one of them picked me up and helped me hold the rod and get the timing of the casting right. Fly fishing is true fishing.

Dad never said his father wasn't what or who he should have been. All I knew was that Grandpa wasn't in the stories. Dad's stories wove through my childhood like my own hazy memories. He had his share of fables, with their little moral wrapped up like a bow on top of a package, but most of the stories were simply glimpses of how it used to be. So the old farm where Great Grandpa Moore rescued Dad from the angry sow was just like an old neglected play place of mine. And when we visited his cousin Dorothy, I swear I could remember her

winning the Fourth of July horse race riding Old Charlie. But Grandpa had no story, and his presence felt like an intrusion.

He used to tease me until I cried. Once when I was six, I drove with him to the store. I was crying when we finally got home, and I slammed the truck door and ran in to find Dad. Grandpa sauntered in after me and answered the question of why I was so upset with "Jefinner's just sensitive." I hated him a little bit for making Dad laugh down at me like that.

We kids visited Grandma every year in Salt Lake. I remember realizing it wasn't normal and asking her why they didn't live together. She tilted her head and her eyes focused on something far away. "Because he wanted to live in Heber and I wanted to live here." It was Mom who told me years later that she left him because of the drinking. They waited till Dad and Mom were married, and even then it was months before Grandma admitted that she wasn't just spending a few nights at her sister's .

My senior year of high school Grandpa lived with us for a couple of months. Mom orchestrated the whole thing. She wanted to give my youngest brothers a chance to know Grandpa. There was some story about needing urgent help with the landscaping and everyone was willing to accept that excuse. I think that's the only time he ever saw where we live. I expected to feel the same as I did in the brick house after the long drive, except with no "Lake Creek" to escape to. But I knew all the stories at home and could accept an intruder better there. When he came, he hugged me and said, "It's been a long time, hasn't it, Jefinner?"

Grandpa worked hard. And he got the boys to help him. I watched from the kitchen window one day. They were digging a trench. The shovel looked gigantic in my youngest brother, Aaron's hands. As he mechanically turned to dump his scoop of dirt, Grandpa quickly filled in the hole Aaron had just dug, behind his back. After a few shovelfuls of Grandpa's dirt, Aaron dropped his tool to examine things more carefully. Grandpa leaned on his shovel, pushed his hat back on his head and laughed.

On Saturdays Dad would join them, and I was ok that it was just the boys. One time, Grandpa was catching his breath in a lawn chair and I brought him a glass of water. I sat with him and we watched Dad and the boys trying to throw dirt in each others' holes without getting caught. That time we both laughed together. I said, "You started this, you know."

Grandpa nodded, "But he's a better father than I was."

I wished I could have disagreed.

Grandpa had an infamously bad heart. He had seven heart attacks in his life and three bypass surgeries. But he always surprised the doctors. Once, during a routine check-up, the doctor noticed an irregular heart beat and panicked. Grandpa was admitted to the hospital and was there a week before the doctors decided to believe him; that it was normal and he wasn't going to drop dead. I was nineteen when I started having palpitations. They said it's slight arrhythmia which runs in some families. Strange that after all my efforts to be like my father, I got his father's heart.

I was at college when everything happened. I knew something was wrong when Mom told me Dad flew to Utah alone. He called me a few days later, "Jen, how are you?"

"What's wrong?" was all I said. Dad told me Grandpa had been helping his niece put in sprinklers when he asked to be taken to the hospital. That's a bad sign when a Chidester asks to be taken to the hospital. He crashed and they had to bring him back with those electric shock paddles. The doctors called it "Multiple Organ Systems Failure." He went into surgery, but they couldn't find out what was wrong, and he was so swollen with fluid they couldn't close him back up. "The stuff they covered his cut with looks like plastic wrap," Dad said. After that, Grandpa didn't wake up much, and could only nod and blink when he was conscious.

Mom told me that when Grandma heard, she told Dad, "Tell him I always loved him. Tell him I was just giving him the space he so desperately wanted." It sounded like a line from a movie. And that's not how Grandma usually talks. I told Dad to tell him "Jefinner loves him."

I could hear the smile in his voice when Dad told me, "Yesterday, one of his friends called and said he was back in town after a fishing trip and was coming by the hospital. I told Grandpa that I'd informed his friend not to come telling any fish stories, because we all knew he can't catch a thing. Grandpa's eyes smiled and he nodded definitely in agreement. Good to see that his mental function was up enough to appreciating sarcasm – clearly a higher level of mental processing." Dad paused and swallowed. "The doctors were pretty pessimistic, but he's proved them wrong before. He's making progress in a lot of small ways that adds up to tip the balance in his favor."

Grandpa surprised us that time by actually doing what the doctors said. He died on June 10th. After setting up everything for the funeral, Dad sent out an email. It said;

You are invited to "compete" in the John Chidester Celebratory Fishing Tournament

Date: Saturday, June 17, 2006

Time: 6:00 pm

Location: John's Pond

Lake Creek, Utah

(Go East on Center Street from Heber City up into the hills until you find us at John's Pond on your right.)

Prizes will be awarded for the first, the biggest, and the most. Please join friends and family for the evening. We'll sit by the fire, enjoy each other's company, share some memories – who knows, someone may actually catch a fish.

During his life, John was not high on attending events like funerals.

*But a funeral with a fishing tournament...
now that's something he would have been into.*

That felt right. It was his pond.

The funeral was bad. Grandma sobbed. I'd never heard sorrow so dry and painful. Grandpa's twin sister, Jean, leaned on her daughter the whole time. I felt tired watching her and distracted from whatever I should have been feeling. I was glad when it was over.

At "Lake Creek" it's easier to pretend that nothing has changed. Various cousins from the sprawling Chidester family tree, almost all guys, showed up for the Fishing Tournament. Dad's childhood friend, Wayne, came, and five or six of Grandpa's hunting buddies showed up with chairs and a cooler. Mom had to take Grandma home and put her to bed.

The fish weren't biting. Dad changed the fly he was using, and the hunting buddies popped open some beers and someone produced wood for a fire. We walked a little ways down the bank to get away from the noise. We held our poles and waded out into the water.

As the sun sank the pond started to glow, illuminating every ripple and even the dust in the air. That's the best time for fishing. I've never seen my Dad cry, and he looked close to it. That scared me so I fumbled around for something to fill up the silence. I told Dad a story.

"Last night, I was laying in bed, and I remembered one time when I was really little, fishing with Grandpa. He was showing me how to put velveeta cheese on the hook, and trying to get me not to reel the

line in so fast that the cheese fell off. I think we caught I real big one, at least as long as my arm. But back then my arms were pretty short.”

“You caught a big one every time. Grandpa said you were a lucky charm.”

“I thought that was what you called me.”

“No, you’re remembering wrong. That was your Grandpa.” Dad pulled out some line for slack and started casting, pulling his arm back, pausing, then flicking the line forward. Nope, too short. Pull back, pause, flick forward. One more time and, just right. The line lay out right in front of where a rainbow had just risen.

“He would have liked this.” Dad nodded. He wasn’t close to crying anymore, but my throat was tight. “I wish he was here, Dad.” And it was true.

Are you Chinese?

Hua Ching Chang

I wore a tag big enough to cover half my body. The tag said, "I speak Taiwanese." At every class break, I had to wear that tag until I found someone else who spoke my language. Other students avoided me as if I were a disease. Some pointed at me, and some walked away whispering. Others ran past me and gazed at the tag. I did not know if they felt sorry for me or mocked me. An invisible wall divided me from others wherever I went. The distance disappeared when I took the tag off. Back in those days, speaking Taiwanese was not allowed in school. Schools encouraged students to speak Mandarin by punishing those who spoke Taiwanese. When I was in elementary school, our punishment was more like a game. We liked to make fun of each other; however, we did not want to be caught.

Taiwan is an island surrounded by the Taiwan Channel (west), the Pacific Ocean (east), South China Sea (north), and the Bashi Channel (south). Japan is on her northeast, and Mainland China is on her west. Around the 15th century, when the Portuguese passed by Taiwan, they sighed "Ilah Formosa," which means beautiful island. In 1622, when Holland occupied Taiwan, they kept the name. In 1662, an exiled general, Jung, from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) booted the Hollanders out of Taiwan. Then, during the 16th and 17th centuries, people from northeast China immigrated to Taiwan for survival. They were the ancestors of those people now called Taiwanese. In Mainland China around the early 1900's, eight countries allied against the Ching dynasty (1644-1911), and Ching lost the war. Those countries forced Ching to pay a large amount of money in reparations and to cede negotiated territory to them. Taiwan was ceded to Japan at that time.

The Ching dynasty ended in 1911, and the Republic of China was established. In 1921, the Communist Party led an insurrection against the Nationalist Party. Before WWII, both parties had fought. During WWII, they held different opinions, each fighting to govern the country in their own way. Worst of all, each group fought for power and profit for only themselves. In 1945, after WWII, Japan returned Taiwan to the Chinese government, which was then the

Republic of China. The Nationalist Party lost the civil war to the Communists and fell back to Taiwan while the Communist Party maintained control of Mainland China. Soon after that, in 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. The two groups, one in Taiwan and one in Mainland China, have never accepted each other; they saw each other as traitors, each wanting to govern the other's territory. At that time, the Nationalist Party still dreamed of going back to China, and taking over the government again. They used Taiwan as a battle station, and set policy that curbed their thinking and patriotism. Therefore, speaking Taiwanese in school was forbidden because it showed no allegiance to Mainland China, which the Chinese in Taiwan hoped to return. However, my friends, classmates, family and I spoke Taiwanese at home and outside the schools. I still consider Taiwanese my mother tongue.

When I was older, I moved to Taipei city. Most of the people around me didn't speak Taiwanese. They could not understand what my brother and I were saying. They, like my father, came from China after the civil war. They were categorized "Chinese." For better communication, I used Mandarin more and more. Gradually, I didn't speak Taiwanese as well. Time passed, I became more fluent in Mandarin. I had no problem learning both and using them. I never thought too much about it. Until one day...

in the summer, and the sun was shining. In a small country town in the middle part of Taiwan, my mission companion and I were looking for a church member's house, but could not find it. We decided to ask for help. We chose to ask an elderly man for directions; elders usually know more things. I used the address paper to cover my head and I squinting my eyes because of the glaring sun, I saw a grandpa waiting to cross the street. I ran to him.

"Excuse me. May I ask a question?" I asked him and didn't forget my smile.

"What did you say?" the grandpa asked in Taiwanese.

"Well, could you please...?"

"Why do you speak Mandarin?" he asked. "Taiwanese should speak Taiwanese," he scolded me and walked away.

I went back to my companion with a quizzical look.

"Did you get the directions?" my companion asked.

I shook my head, still thinking about what just happened.

"The old man scolded me," I replied, still not sure what had really happened.

"Why?"

"Because I spoke Mandarin."

"So, what are you supposed to speak?"

The question hit me, "Taiwanese," I said.

In 1986, the Democratic Progressive Party had been established in Taiwan. Thus, Taiwanese consciousness was rising faster than at any other period of time in Taiwan history. It created small sparks of patriotism in different parts of Taiwan, in people's lives, and in people's hearts.

When I returned from my mission to Tainan, a city in south of Taiwan, I had a chance to eat out with my mother and her dance club members. In the restaurant, we sat at a round table, talking while waiting for the food. My mother introduced me to some of her friends. Rightly, I spoke to my mother in Mandarin. Suddenly, I heard a familiar scolding.

"Why do you speak Mandarin? Taiwanese should speak Taiwanese." A couple sitting across from me rebuked me. I guessed that they were about fifty. The wife looked at me as if I was doing something shameful. She scolded me in a dismissive tone and her husband showed his disappointment and echoed, "Only Chinese speak Mandarin." Others were looking at me and saying nothing.

I got so mad. They were rude to scold a person like that, especially for what seemed a ridiculous reason. The rest of the time I didn't look at them as I ate. I don't even remember how the food tasted. After the meal, I complained to my mother when we were home. How dare her friends scold me for that reason in public? My mother said she didn't know they would do that.

The third time happened in a gym. I met an old man in the gym, because we went to the gym at the same time almost every day so we started chatting. One day, we talked about language. He held the same opinion as the other old people I'd met. They all thought, "Taiwanese should speak Taiwanese," and "Chinese should speak Mandarin." I indicated that I didn't choose my language. The environment made me choose. Isn't it ridiculous to be scolded for that reason? Also, I said that language is a communication tool just like English. He said "I would throttle you if I were your father. I feel shame for you."

What he said really irritated me. I wanted to say more, but the coach came to stop us.

Even though I was mad at these people who embarrassed me in public, I started to think why these elders insisted on the same idea. I realized they all had similar characteristics. They were all old, about fifty or older and had experienced the oppressive governance of the Nationalist Party. They were so-called “Taiwanese” and thought the people in the Nationalist Party were outsiders. They took every chance to pour out their grievances.

The Presidential Election in 2000 had ignited this situation. The harsh slogans such as “Chinese, get out of Taiwan” and “Taiwanese people love Taiwan,” not only hurt my eyes but also offended my heart. What was I, then? Was I categorized as Chinese, because my father was from China, or because of my accent, or because I speak Mandarin?

As I stood in front of the poster, and read the slogans, the sun was still shining as the cars passed me by. People’s lives continued, but the air surrounding me was frozen. I felt strange. I could not decide whether the city was a stranger to me, or I was a stranger to it. Only a few words could cut me into two parts, and also cut me from the world which I used to know. I was born in Taiwan. If I am not Taiwanese, what am I?

In 2000, the first Taiwan president with a “Taiwanese” background was elected. Since then, Taiwanese people have two opinions. One group is still thinking of going back to China, and the other one is still telling the world, “Taiwan is an independent country,” and “Chinese should get out of Taiwan”. They have stopped calling my country “The Republic of China” but “Taiwan” instead.

For years, the Chinese government has threatened Taiwan with harsh words and by military maneuvers. They have isolated Taiwan by preventing us from attending international meetings, organizations, and activities. Taiwan’s flag cannot appear in any international milieu because it now represented a country. So if at any meeting, or activities, if the Taiwan flag is hung, that means they accept Taiwan as an independent country. And the Chinese government cannot accept that because they insist that Taiwan belongs to them. What the Chinese government doing has made more and more people in Taiwan think of the “Chinese” as enemies

Years later, I stood in line at the cafeteria in BYUH, looking at the food which I wasn't familiar with. A student asked me in a friendly way, "Are you Chinese?"

"No, I am not." I stared at him unhappy as old memories flooded into my mind, wondering what he was going to say next. With innocent eyes, he said nothing but "Oh."

When speaking about the Chinese, the first impression people here have is of Mainland China or the People's Republic of China. I learned this as I met more friends and classmates from around the world. Most of them think that Taiwan is part of China or at least have asked if Taiwan is part of China. I know how many Taiwanese people hate that idea. I know that not only because I am from Taiwan but also because I was an innocent victim of that prejudice.

Back home, I used to see children pointing to foreigners calling them "Americans." For them, white people are all Americans; no matter if they are from the United States, Canada or Europe. For example, a missionary told a little boy with patience that he was from Canada. The next day when the boy saw him, he pointed to the Elder and said, "American." So, maybe for others, all Chinese are from China.

The other day, a Tahitian friend invited me to go to their Family Home Evening and the theme for the month was about the Chinese. She wanted me to tell them why Taiwanese students dislike people calling them Chinese. I asked why she wanted to know. She said that she felt hostility every time she does it. I was thinking of how to answer her and also to myself: How do Taiwanese people identify themselves? How do I identify myself? I am Chinese because of the Chinese blood in me, but I do not want to be Chinese. I am Taiwanese because I was born in Taiwan, but the Taiwanese do not want me to be Taiwanese. I am cut into two just like Taiwan and China.

There are African-Americans and Mexican-Americans. In a nutshell, I call myself Taiwanese-Chinese. When people in Taiwan argue about who loves Taiwan the most, I cried. I cried when I saw the Taiwan flag raised in the little circle on BYUH campus by a Taiwanese student on the BYUH 50th Jubilee Celebration. My tears continued to flow when I saw the flag fluttering in the air. Finally, I got the answer. I got it here, Hawaii, in the United States of America: I am a Taiwanese Chinese.

Flying Sun

Keola Harrison



Liberation

BJ Liao

Freedom to Fall.

forget flying.
flying is dreaming –
a dream across nations and Time.
unattainable by man's prowess alone.
But Falling – falling you can

grasp.

wicked,

falling is fast,
death defying and
oh-so-exhilarating.

It begins with the plunge –
your heart jumping out,
adrenaline rushing –
Pulsing.
The waves of Blood within –
Coursing.

Energy fills your being.
Soul igniting,
it touches breathtaking heights.
You reach farther for

that which is forbidden
that which is intoxicating

and crash.

Telescope

Jennifer Chidester



The Interlude of Light and Darkness

Brandon Orgill

Two halves a whole cannot complete, until such time as when they meet. If day and night alone to reap, the pleasures of their fame, they'd find the treasures rather cheap, and their bodies now stand lame.

For what is darkness without light, to show the beauty of the night?
And light when found alone it stands, rather bland without darkest hands; to hold around it ever sure, that they need each other to be pure.

And dance the tragic pair will play, through night and darkness, and dark till day. When every moment what they seek, shall not be found until they meet. And in the interlude they raise, the song of ever changing ways; which in sadness has been formed, the ways the light and darkness born.

How intertwined the pair now frame, a world which shouts either refrain, to darkness which masks their evil ways, or light that gets them through their days. And suggest to mind of fragment view, often shouted from the pew: light alone is what to seek, and only found by the meek, the lowly and the wayward sons, the journey over, the chances done.

But upon awaking when life is through, we all shall find what is true. Neither light nor dark, is what we sought, but what their completion brought. The perfect joining of each half will awaken the mind to the path. Perfection is drawn in one whole, which nary a lie can annul; Conjoined the pair has always been, and so shall they stand through every end.

Elijah

Shem Greenwood

If I knew your incantation
And understood the clean, uncompromising light
In the blue doomsday fire of your eyes
Then never again would I wear this knotted rope
To swing shameful bones from black gallows in my mind
Had I the strength with which you close your round, grasping hand
I could lift the weight of violence from off the burning earth,
And discard it, and we would all find peace at last.
If I could know what worry clouds your infant brow
I'd weep till my heart turned white
A pearl of quiet, an offering for this altar
And if I possessed love as you possess it, absolute, effortless, unbroken
As easily as I hold the memory of my own name

I would put off death like a garment, and naked walk
With strange and generous gods

I knew all this once, and perhaps will learn again
When fatherhood opens the gates to me
Of this last and holiest shrine

Untitled

Debbie Frampton



My Inheritance

Lisa FeHoko

The Tongan motto of patriotism is implicit in stating that devotion is first to God, then to Tonga—presumably an allusion to politics and mercurial ideals rather than to the rustic conditions of a third world country. Growing up in America, I found myself at odds with my transnational sense of identity. My return to the homeland last July (2007) fueled my jaded perspective about my indigenous roots; enclosed is an excerpt from my memoirs in dedication to a foreign land that I sometimes love and continue to misconstrue: Koe 'Otua Mo Tonga Ko Hoku Tofi'a—tu'a 'ofa atu ki he fonua tala'ofa.

“I thought you hated Chinese food, G.”

He ignored me—*again*. This silent wall of ineptitude that he put up brought out the stalker in me; I tried in vain to smother my desires. G and I were seated across the table from one another, flanked by Laney on my right and Annie on my left. Annie was starting to get under my skin with her flair for exhibitionism; I wedged myself into the seat, seething at her lack of inhibition.

An infant waitress came over and gave us our menus. I guess the Child Labor Laws did not apply here in Tonga. She grinned hard, intent on being an *American* waitress. *Go away infant. I'm not tipping you.* She gave us two minutes to decide, all the while standing in front of us with a blank stare.

“Wha' wuud chu likes to odor?” She asked finally, directing the question at me.

“What?” I looked at her, perplexed.

“Odor. Wha' wuud chu likes?”

Oh, she meant *order*. *What would I like to order? Perhaps an A-bomb of See Spot Run books for a twenty mile radius.* But all that came out was, “Oh, I'll have the hot and spicy chicken.” I figure whatever amoeba I was downing was going to first go through the fire, then hot sauce,

prior to infecting me with tapeworm. Oddly, the thought made me hungry. *Mmmmmnnnn...bring on the nasties.*

The first round of platters was delicious, to say the least. The 'everything seafood' dish was questionable, but still delectable—even if one of the items looked like reduced pterodactyl in brine sauce. Oh well, nothing ventured, nothing gained (except heavy medical bills in antibiotics when I get back home).

G was busy working on a skewered beef platter that he had no desire to share; his arms formed a makeshift fence around the platter, which he never took his eyes off of. *Scorch your tongue, ingrate.*

With a half masticated slab of beef hanging from his face, he grimaced and said, "Thees taste likes dogs."

Dog? It looked too good to be dog. Sexy liar. Dog. Yeah right. I piped up, "Here, lemme have some." G passed me a meaty slice of beef. I took one bite and tasted an explosion of msg-laden sauce, an overdose of salt, and ambiguous beef in my mouth which triggered a gag-reflex. There was a trace of something gamey in this funky morsel. With the abundance of mongrels and wild dingoes roaming this small expanse, it made sense that something had to give—that sooner or later, someone was going to put a puppy to the skewer. Now I knew the *true* reason pigs outnumbered dogs five to one here in Tonga; the Asian market made a killing, no pun intended, on flea infested canines. Generally, I never judged other people's proclivities, whatever they were, but I did draw the line at eating Cujo. My stomach made a loud skidding sound and I felt the Srirachi sauce burn as it came back up my throat.

I excused myself and made a dash towards the bathroom. The Srirachi sauce was on my flip flops before I made it into one of the stalls. I spewed onto the sink, partially into the trash can, on the wall, and all over the lower half of my jeans and on my feet. *Oh how I wish I were back at the Blow Holes, with the night hiding the dirty little deed I just committed.* The nightclub next door thumped loud music, shaking the rice paper thin walls like a diaphanous garment. Fragmented conversation trailed in from the bar as I continued to spew on the floor; five minutes elapsed and I was dry heaving. The stench of bile mingled with Srirachi and chopped veggies was rancid.

Great, now I had to clean up. I started with the sink, since I needed a clean sink to rinse everything else off in. I cupped clumps of vomit in my hands and dumped it into the trash can, and repeated the process until I could see the drain again. To wash my hands, I ran the hot water tap and a brown sludge came forth, oozing onto my fingers. I

turned off the tap and dry heaved for two minutes more; then I turned on the cold tap and clear water burst out. I nearly cried with joy; funny how something simple, like clean water takes on greater value when there's a scarcity of it. I washed my hands and pulled a paper towel from the dispenser. The towel, which was fabric material instead of paper, came off the wall, along with the dispenser, and landed on the floor on pepto-pink chunks of rice. More throw-up splatter sprayed the walls like art deco. I started to laugh. My laugh was low because acrid bile was still sitting in my throat, but as minutes progressed, I crowed with unfettered hysteria. My voice rose and bellowed to the rafters, and I suddenly realized that the nightclub music was now softer. The fragments of conversation had stopped; I knew they were listening to my delusional wails of glee. I stifled my gaiety and peed my pants. That set me off on another fit of hysterics, and I laughed until Laney walked in and saw me.

At first she just gave me a strange 'once over' and asked if everything was okay, but when she realized what had happened, she started to laugh.

"What happened?" she asked, knowing well enough; her face looked pained because of her inability to hide laughter.

"I...I had some of the...the dog." I started to giggle.

She pointed at my pants and said, "No...[*Her face was pink from lack of oxygen*]...your pants...on fire? Did you d-d-d-douse it w-w-w-with—" she was in hysterics.

"—Yes...built in...extinguisher," I guffawed.

She was doubled over in pain with her hands on her knees, but she kept her head up, looking at the growing patch that drenched my middle. I started to hula, and Laney threw her head back to roar, but her left foot was on the margins of regurgitated veggies, so the arching movement to laugh threw her off balance and she slipped and fell onto the floor. She got the wind knocked out of her, but her shrieks came out in short spurts.

"Seriously Lane, what am I going to do about my pants?"

Laney's eyes rolled back as she continued to shriek. She was no use.

I giggled to myself as I started back up on the cleaning process. I took my sweater off and put it on a clean, dry part of the sink. Then I tore the towel material off the dispenser hinges and mopped up the wall splatter, which took ten minutes of furious scrubbing because it

had sprayed at such an odd angle. By then, Laney had moved to a stall and sat on one of the pots to fix herself up while leering at me.

"I smell like throw-up and bathroom floor," she said.

"I know."

Laney was cool although a tad off kilter at times. I'm sure she thought I was cool too, and possibly a little strange, especially since I managed to summon Niagara Falls rather than Calgon.

After rinsing off the towel, I scrubbed the floor; in my attempt to gather as much vomit as I could, veggie chunks rose to the top of the towel, cascading out over the brim. The smell of food mixed with musty urine and dried fecal matter was horrendous. I promptly discarded the filthy mixture and stuck my feet into the sink to wash.

With clean-up behind me, I attempted to fix myself up. My pants were splattered with spew, so rather than deal with the mess, I simply wiped off the excess barf and folded the denim up to my knees. I was trying to pull off a fashion faux pas and thought I looked ridiculous, but I knew that if I remained confident then everyone that saw me would think it was a new trend; somehow, I felt that these people were not so easily deceived. I looked in the mirror and saw the reflection of a room deodorizer spray on the window sill. I had a sudden inspiration; moving quickly, I grabbed the spray, aiming the nozzle at my pants.

"What are you doing?" Laney asked.

"Covering the scent," I answered.

"You're not gonna do what I think you are—"

I gunned the spray, leaving white streaks on my now dark blue denim.

Laney shook her head as she looked at me.

I took my sweater and wore it over my jeans like a skirt, putting the trunk of my body through the now overstretched neck, and tied the sleeves forward in a bow.

"You look ridiculous. Take that off," she said.

"Bite me. You're not the one with a growing ink blot and throw-up on your clothes Lane," I quipped.

"Okaaaaay, suit yourself—but you look like a very gay clown," she stated matter-of-factly.

"Lane..." I said.

"Chaa?" She yawned.

"This spray...kinda stings."

"No kidding." She eyed me until I looked away.

We exited the bathroom together and walked back to the table.

"Took chu long enuff. Wha' were chu doings in there?" G asked.

Upchucking. Laney and I merely giggled as we stood before them.

G looked at me and asked, "Hey, when deed 'chu lass shaves?"

"Huh?" I asked, caught off guard by his question. *Here we go with more hair follicle comments.* G was looking at my legs. I followed his eyes and saw that from the denim knee fold of my jeans to my ankles, two weeks worth of hair growth stuck out in baby spikes. Wonderful. I kept the Mastodon strain alive.

Drive

We left the restaurant in a hurry, or rather, I kow-towed everyone out so that I could hide within the confines of the car.

"I steel don' understands why we haddo leaves so soon," G complained.

"Are you still hungry, G?" My voice was curt.

"No..." He lied.

Vacuum. He sucked most of the food down while Laney and I were in the bathroom. Then again, I chucked most of mine out.

We drove south, moving along a scenic ocean view. G quipped, "We're goings to Pa Tangata. 'Ees a blace where the boor peeps leave."

Now I'm gonna see where Lil Bo Peep lives.

The drive down the road was winding. Thankfully, I got the retch out of the way because—

"What was that?" Annie screamed. Something was a-thumping under the car.

G pulled over to the side of the road, got out of the car, and walked toward the front fender. A few minutes later, he was back in the car, and we started off again.

"G," Annie asked, her voice slithering, "what happened?"

“Was it a dead body your fender picked up, G?” I asked, tongue-in-cheek. Laney and I laughed.

Surprisingly, he laughed too and said, “Naah, ‘ees nating, jus’ the bumper goings off the hinchies. Anyways, we’re almos’ dere. This is the drash area.”

We were in the extremely poor part of Tonga—where the makeshift shanties were held together by rusty nails that these people of Pa Tangata found while digging through the refuse. The trash site extended for a quarter of a mile and juxtaposed a cow pasture. I noticed a lone cow rutting through the weeds near the dump site.

“Next to the drash is a gow basture.”

*Yesssss—a “gow” bastard. Wait a minute. If that “gow”—oops, cow is eating trash, then the—*It dawned on me that the funky beef I tasted at the Chinese restaurant was not dog, but in fact, a trash grazing bovine. It all made sense, and suddenly, a scene from Moby Dick came to mind—where the briney taste of cow milk at a certain codfish restaurant was attributed to the shellfish the cows grazed on prior to milking. What a strangely cyclical discovery: the trash fed cows that fed people who discarded trash. This circular yet recyclable conundrum blew my mind—and my stomach acids. I passed out with my mouth open.

**

Rubbernecking

I awoke with a start, soaked in sweat. My eyetooth crown was loose; it must’ve popped while I slept. The last time I loosened that tooth was when I had my tongue pierced and later bit down on the stud in a fit of bruxism. My t-shirt was drenched; a big, smeary U stain ran down the front from my neck to chest area, and a strip ran down the middle of my back. I sat up and held onto the frayed edges of the couch. My crotch area was wet as well. The couch had dark patches—marked eagerly by the areas I plundered in my slumber; the smell of our material tussle lingered on my hair and clothes. My fingertips felt like explosive sausages; I blew on them, then licked the tips. My nails were bitten to the quick. Gross. I was disorientated, assuming that the car movements beneath me had paused for a reason. The livingroom couch had driven; it whispered vulgar words in woven spaces. I leaned into the frays and felt a wave of remorse. Annie and Laney were sitting

on nearby stools, laughing at me. Already, they marginalized my delusional stupor.

“Are you done making out with that couch?” Laney was smiling.

“Where’s G?” I croaked. My voice tended towards a testosterone-laden timbre when the cobwebs of sleep still seized me. I looked through Laney, still trying to get my mind focused on the present.

Laney smiled and said, “He should be here any minute now.”

Now I was more confused; the couch’s relevance didn’t fully sink in yet. “Where’d he go?” The sun was fading out. Strange. Ephemeral lighting from the fading sun made the room vivid. The colors crackled and danced a dry fire among parched timber.

“We should stay,” Laney whispered, “you don’t look well.”

“I’m fine.”

“Sure?”

“Yeah.”

I walked towards the bedroom, ignoring the bits of conversation trailing in behind me. The top bunk was a gamble, but after several attempts, I managed to maneuver myself into it. The evening air on my damp skin made me cold and I slipped into my comforter, burrito wrapping myself in warmth. I poked my fingers out of the wrap to shut the louvers, then rubbed my body down to keep the heat; my toes hurt from extended exposure to the chill. I tucked my toes in, cupping them in icy hands. I shivered uncontrollably and the movements gradually warmed me. I rocked back and forth; the momentum made the bed creak. I buried my face in the pillow, inhaling strawberry conditioner. I let the crisp linen tickle my skin, swallowing an ache for the sordid emotions that shifted within me. I looked at the ceiling fan, mentally willing it to stop. *What moron leaves it on on a cold day?* Oops. I had turned the fan on last night and forgot to switch off. A reckless spider was building a web in the corner ceiling where four edges converged and trapped air pockets. *Looney arachnoid.* I laughed. My therapist once told me that I was afraid of spiders. A-r-a-c-h-n-o-p-h-o-b-i-a; she spelled it with a southern drawl. Nice big word that promised never-ending discomfort around eight legged creatures. *Why did that title, “therapist” seem so nefarious? Therapist? Therapist. therapisttherapisttherapist—the rapist.* She probed me, made me screwy. My brain had a ten pound tumor of stupidity. I named it progress. It lives comfortably in Silicon Valley and never calls. Estranged baby. I was overwhelmed with homesickness for America.

The telephone ringing sliced my trance to ribbons. Laney's muffled speech ensued. I laughed, remembering that once in a while when the phone rings, I like to pick up and not say a word. The caller hangs up, assuming that the connection is faulty. It's a very passive existence on the caller's part. Whatever happened to proactivity? Then again, I do the same thing when I call a number and no one greets me upon pickup. I'm just as guilty of being a passive hanger-upper.

Laney's voice came loud, grounding me into mattress springs. "G just called. He'll be here in five minutes."

Yeah well, G can stuff it because he's taking too long. But I dragged myself out of utero and headed towards the shower. I ran the shower while stripping down, silently thanking the heater-gods for this creature comfort. I couldn't figure out how Laney dealt with cold showers so well; must be the *de Sade* strain in her lineage. I laughed softly; the commonality of sadomasochism stretching the ages seemed perverse—as it should be. Sad. *Sad—the castrated lovechild of sadistic.* I stepped into the spray and let the first few strikes of a warm river cascade down. The water was my rebirth, jarring me out of the haze of the past few hours.

I stepped out of the shower, rejuvenated, and at that moment, Annie walked into the bathroom. The shock sent us both reeling. I moved backwards and slipped, falling at a funny angle, cracking my head against the tile floor. Blood oozed out, spilling into strange pathways along the grooves of moldy tile. Annie's scream blared in the creeping darkness.

*

I awoke to the light pattering of rain on my crown of curls. A flying fox shrieked in the distance; the echoes carried through the trees. G was driving us home, a little miffed that I didn't stay up through his guided tour. My sweater was saturated; the smell was overpowering but everyone politely pretended not to notice.

Confessions of a True Southerner: What bless your heart really means

Jennifer Youngblood

We've all heard it, and most of us have said it, but what does it really mean? Now, before all of you dyed-in-the-wool Southerners get your drawers in a wad and start hollering that I'm preaching to the choir, let me continue. "Bless your heart" is not something that you have to explain to Southerners. We all understand it because it's our language. We all know that "bless your heart" has many meanings, kind of like how the word *aloha* means *hello*, *goodbye*, and *I love you*, in Hawaiian. It all depends on how you use it. Like I said earlier, I used to think that everybody knew what "bless your heart" meant, and it wasn't until a friend of mine from out West started complaining about it that I realized that the term could be confusing to foreigners. So, here are a few simple definitions you can use the next time a Yankee or Westerner starts carrying on about the way we talk.

1. "Bless your heart" is a form of empathy. It's like giving someone a great big hug. When a friend starts complaining about her rotten boss, her no count husband, and how the kids are driving her crazy, we just shake our heads and look her in the eye and give her a heartfelt "bless your heart." It's our way of saying "Honey, I'm so sorry. I know just how you feel, and I'm glad that today it's you and not me."
2. When your cousin Susie does something just plain dumb, and your aunt Margaret calls you up to tell you about it, you just listen real close and utter a few "bless her hearts" when she pauses long enough to draw in a breath. That way you'll both know that even though Susie doesn't have enough sense to blow up a pea, she's still family after all, and we love her anyway.

3. In the South, we believe in being polite even if it kills us. So, when we just can't fight the urge to say something nasty, we follow it up with a "bless her heart" just to make us feel better. "Look at that poor woman trying to jog around that track. Her rear-end is dragging a trail, bless her heart."
4. Probably the most important way we use "bless your heart" is so we can identify each other. When I'm far from home and feeling all alone, I just throw out a few "bless your hearts" into the conversation and see what happens. If the person I'm talking to gets this confused look like I've just sprouted another head, then I just go on to the next person and do the same thing until finally I hear that familiar twang that's sweeter than a melody and then come those beautiful words "Well, bless your heart." That's when I know I'm home—even though I'm a thousand miles away.

So the next time someone comes up and puts an arm around you and offers a heart-felt "bless your heart," you'd better count your lucky stars that you're in a place where people still care enough to say it. Yes, indeed. Bless your heart, and God bless the hearts of all Southerners!

Untitled

Danielle Jarvis



Frogs

Larisa Schumann

Lately

I have developed a new perspective on frogs
squished dead and dry on the pavement
as I now perch atop my bicycle
blue beach cruiser with white basket

Before my bike I could observe them
hardened and crisp
from the safe distance of the sidewalk

But now my fat black bike tires grip and glide
rolling over them
their corpses hardened and black
like bits of rubber
left on Mainland highways by big rigs
Except these little bits are
in the shapes of frogs
splayed
reaching out, praying, begging
to be spared
the fate of being second-hand fodder
for my bicycle
on Naniloa Loop.

Arcturus

Wulf Barsch von Benedikt





Case # 23TV728Zh: Emperor Rashykk vs. the people of Jawrak

Vasu Chetty

Kotor: a single planet with a single island that houses a single building, which contains a single room, home to a single table with fourteen chairs. The door opens and they begin to file in and take their seats, one by one.

“I see Death is late as usual,” comments Life.

“He’s been busy lately, it’s understandable,” replies Wisdom.

“These councils are such a waste of time. I could be out plundering innocent minds,” comments Chaos smugly.

“Waste not, want not,” mutters Time to no one in particular.

The door crashes open and Death enters the room. “Sorry I’m late. Work was murder.”

He takes his seat across from Life, who shoots him a dirty scowl.

“Apology accepted,” remarked Acceptance, always eager to please.

Time stands from his place at the head of the table, gavel in hand, knocking several times on the desk and saying, “This council is now officially in session. On today’s agenda is case number 23TV728Zh, the trial of Emperor Rashykk vs. the planet of Jawrak. Emperor Rashykk has been accused of attempted genocide. The facts are these: three kleks ago, on Marzo 27, at approximately 0300 phions, universal time, the emperor tried to destroy the planet of Jawrak, home to over 12 billion half-elves and over 3 billion veerkzen, by breaking down the laws of physics in order to cause the planet to implode upon itself, thereby leaving nothing but a black hole as evidence. Given my ability to peruse time at my leisure, I was able to apprehend him before he was able to follow through with his attempt. All the necessary information has been compiled in the report you each see printed on the page in front of you. You the council will have a little time now to read over them before the defendant arrives.”

Silence broken only by the rustling of papers, (Idiocy cannot read, his pretense of doing so shattered by the fact his report is held upside down).

After each member of the council, other than Idiocy, finishes the reading, Time continues, "The defendant is currently being held in a high security holding cell on Urlerphia." A smirk appears on the face of Bondage, while Freedom frowns deeply. Time continues without noticing, "and he is being transported by armored veksens to this vicinity by light travel. Given the calculations he should be here in less than two phions."

Less than two phions later, the door opens and Emperor Rashykk enters the room. His hands are in handcuffs and his clothes and face are filthy.

"Remove those shackles from him you vile demons," Freedom cries as he stands and points accusingly at the veksens guards.

"Freedom, contain yourself. We will have order in this council room," comes the timely warning from Time.

"But why, it's so booooooring," yawns Chaos, earning him a look of contempt from Order.

"Veksens, please release the prisoner and then lead him to the chair at the end of the table."

Freedom relaxes as the cuffs are removed and the prisoner is taken to his seat; the veksens swiftly leave the room.

Time seizes control, "Emperor Rashykk, we are here to deliberate on your sentencing for the attempted genocide on the planet of Jawrak. How do you plead?"

"How can you accuse me of something that I didn't actually do?" came the arrogant retort.

"Trying to take me and taking me is just as painful. The failure of the attempt does not excuse the crime," said Life, obviously appalled.

Death couldn't contain himself, "So what's wrong with a little genocide? I do it all the time."

"Yeah, a little bit of me never hurt no one," said Chaos in an unconvincingly innocent voice.

Time butts in to stop the banter, "Quiet please. You will all get a chance to make statements. Emperor Rashykk, don't let my beard

fool you. I am not one to let time burn. Please just answer the question; I don't think you understand how serious this situation is."

"This situation? So a few billion elves and veerzken would have died, oh boy; did you ever stop to think about the eternal consequences of my discovery? I had theoretically broken the laws of physics, and if I could have tested my theories, I could have changed the way we look at the universe," spoke Rashykk arrogantly, with a hint of discontent in his voice.

Right seems surprised, "You don't seem in the least remorseful."

"I'm a scientist. my work is more important than anything or anyone!"

"I reject the belief that your statement is applicable to all scientists," cries Rejection.

"Enough," cries Time as he turns to address the council. "We will have each of your statements now. The future of Emperor Rashykk and the people of Jawrak rest in your hands. We will begin with Wisdom and work our way down the table."

Wisdom stands, "The pursuit of knowledge is a great and terrible thing, but knowledge itself is not sufficient for progress. While Knowledge is my cousin, and I love him, it is not enough to receive just him. That's where I step in. Those who truly seek me will only find me when trying to understand how to better use the knowledge they have gained. The Emperor had gained knowledge, but he failed to convert it into me by understanding it in a way for the betterment of the Universe. He was selfishly pursuing glory, not me. I also feel that the Emperor had, judging by the report, climbed upon the shoulders of greater physicists in the pursuit of knowledge at a radical pace. Sure he achieved an amazing result, but without sacrifice, there is no victory. The Emperor obviously saw it fit that others should be sacrificed in order for his progress, but was never willing to make any sacrifices himself. Therefore, my judgment for his atrocious act, which he claims is the work of science, is condemnation in the first degree." He sits and lets out a long deep breath as he leans back in his chair and waits for Time to call on the next person.

"Idiocy, please report." Time says.

Idiocy jumps out of his chair knocking it to the floor. He trips over the chair leg and his face smacks the table. Wisdom sighs, shaking his head and putting his face in his hands. Idiocy turns to

pick up the chair, but in his haste he backs into the table, dropping the chair the chair on his foot. In exasperation he throws his hands in the air, then turns and cries, "Methinks he stupid." He sits down, forgetting his chair is still lying on its side and he falls to the floor. He stands and continues, "Very stupid." After a few seconds of shuffling, he finally manages to get into his chair and stay seated.

"Freedom," Time continues in a monotone voice, unphased by Idiocy's debacle.

"The truth will set you free. And to be free is to be like me," smiles Freedom. "This man was in the pursuit of truth. He was trying to open the eyes of the scientists in a Universe with too many boundaries and restrictions. Even the deaths of those innocent would have been sending them on the journey after death, which is just a new kind of me." Death smiles, his face hidden behind his long cloaked hood. Freedom presses on, "He was trying to break free of the unknown, and how can we punish a man for that? My vote is to set him free so he may set the minds of others on a path towards me. And how can that be wrong?"

Wrong, knowing full well it isn't an invitation, shoots out of his chair and begins, "It was morally me and ethically me and..."

"Wrong you're speaking out of turn," cries Order, horrified. Time attempts to bang the gavel, but gives up as Wrong ignores them both and carries on, spurred on by Chaos, who laughs enthusiastically at the break in order.

"That just fills me with a whole bunch of glee. It was me on so many levels, more ingenious than sprite little devils! You were dabbling in Physics and finding some new tricks. Oh how delightful, so very spiteful. Genocide, Schmenocide. You did what was me, who better to be? We cannot condemn you, so we'll exalt you." He sits to the sound of Idiocy clapping idiotically.

Time stands, "We will continue in order from here on in."

Order stands up, but Time quickly says, "That would make Bondage next." Not wanting to break the order, Order quickly sits down and Bondage stands.

"He should be locked up. Just like everyone else." Bondage sits.

"One cannot deny that one is always a man of few words," comments Rejection, to no one in particular.

Time calls on Life, who stands; his toga reminds one of an ancient civilization that has long been forgotten. "Jawrak," he

begins, mystically, "so vibrant and youthful; so full of me. What greater tragedy could befall such a planet than the birth of an untamed imbecile? To take your portion of me would be painfully useless, but to leave you to continue would suffer the souls of many before their due time. I think Bondage had the answer. Bondage is the only right answer."

Right, following suit of Wrong, jumps from his chair, having been awoken from napping at the sound of his name. "Quite me, quite me," he begins dazedly, "for once I'll have to agree with my brother, but not quite in the same way of reasoning. Since he is Wrong and I am Right, and we usually oppose each other. Judging whether his actions were truly me or not is a very difficult thing to do. I am most concerned about the overall outcome, and I do believe that inevitably the laws of physics must be shown for what they truly are - a sham. He may not have gone about it entirely correctly, but I truly believe he had the notions of being me at heart. I don't like his pridefulness, but we can't condemn a man for that alone. I say we grant him amnesty."

Time doesn't even bother to bang his gavel, and Order is obviously annoyed. "We must just accept that not everything will always go according to plan," states Acceptance, from his seat next to Order, which doesn't really comfort him.

"Death," calls Time, suppressing a yawn.

Death stands, his voice deep and muffled, "Do I really need to comment on this? This man is a genius! Billions of lives brought to me? That's like a paid vacation." He sits and smiles, his face still hidden behind the cloak, a glint of light sparkles from beneath the darkness.

Order stands, after being called, and commences, "There is much of me in the known universe, and that's what makes everything work in a succinct blend of pure motion that some call living. Without me there is nothing!"

"Actually, that's not quite correct; last I checked my name was Chaos, not nothing. We did grow up in the same house, remember?"

Order scowls, but ignores him. "Rashykk was trying to remove me from the universe, and I do not like that. Conviction for his crime is necessary for the law to be upheld and to keep me in the universe, thereby keeping the universe in control."

“Chaos,” comes the monotone voice of Time. Nobody stirs. “Chaos.” A little firmer. Still nothing. Everyone turns to look at Chaos.

“Oh me, I thought my name was nothing for a second there,” he comments sarcastically. “So, what was this was that, and who wants where. While he was there, I want to verify. Yes, I can be, if he does that and so to be me must have a follow up with her and that must see the trees outside.” He sits down.

“What in the blazes does that mean? What is your verdict?” declares Time.

“I’m not quite sure, but I believe I voted in the affirmative.”

“In the affirmative of what? Conviction or acquittal?”

“Acquittal? What an interesting word. Ok, ok,” sighs Chaos as Times holds up his gavel to throw at his head. “I like a little bit of me now and then, and, well, all the time pretty much, but hey. So the ‘known’ universe would have been thrown into me, big deal. It would have been fun for once. Live life on the edge, I always say. Let’s let him go so he can prove me right.”

Right jumps up from another nap. “Quite me, quite me,” he begins, before Order pulls him back into his seat.

Acceptance stands, “we must accept the truth, and the truth is that if Rashykk was right, the universe needs to know. If he was wrong, what does it matter then? He would have failed in his attempt. We should follow me, and to do so would mean to embrace his discovery. We must clear him of all charges and allow him to embrace his work.”

“I guess I am last,” says Rejection slyly, as he rises. “Interestingly I believe he should be acquitted. I reject the acceptance of him as a prisoner. I reject the idea that he could harm the universe. I reject the idea that...”

“We get the picture,” interrupts Bondage. “Let’s just get on with it.”

“Fine,” sighs Rejection with a touch of contempt, “I reject the fact that he should be condemned.”

Time appears confused. “Acquit him,” says Rejection, rejecting the idea that he should be complicated in his response.

“By my count,” begins Time, in an obvious hurry to be done, “that leaves seven motions for acquittal and five motions for conviction. As a democracy you have decided to set the prisoner free.” He turns to Rashykk, “Against my better judgment, I hereby

officially find you, the defendant, not guilty of genocide and declare you a free man. You will be returned to Jawrak where, we pray to God, we hope that you will not take billions of innocent lives without first considering the repercussions of such an act." He finishes to the sound of Idiocy clapping nonsensically.

They all file out one by one. No words are exchanged. In seventeen kleks each member of the council will receive a memo that the Emperor Rashykk was found dead in his palace, or at least what was left of him. He would blow himself up attempting to prove his theory correct. As for now, the single room in Kotor is left empty, waiting for the council to reconvene at a future date and time.

Good Conversation

Kent Carollo



In the Middle

Jonathan Marler

“What do you want from me?” he bellowed, his hands raised in the air to punctuate the fact he was lost in the mountains without a compass when it came to pleasing her.

“Nothing!” She roared back, “absolutely nothing” her voice fading so he didn’t even hear the “ing.”

Still bellowing but this time his decibel level wasn’t as high, “You’ve got me all tied up inside. You know that?”

“How?” she managed her voice just making it to his ears. He turned to face her. That is when he saw the tears. They had been arguing like this for the last few minutes. Each had something important to say and each was unable to say it.

“Ah hell, I don’t know how we got into this mess.” He sat on the curb next to her. She had her feet on the curb so her knees were in her face. “All I was looking for was a friend and instead I got a head ache.” Her shoulders convulsed as she buried her face in her knees and her arms reached around her legs hugging them closer to her. “Hey, hey I’m sorry okay I’m sorry. It’s just that, well, uh,... ah hell.” His hand found its way up to her shoulder that was covered in a red blouse with small white polka dots dispersed in a linear pattern, he started to rub and scratch in a slow back and forth motion. She responded instantly and the convulsions slowed then stopped then she stretched out on the pavement putting her upper body in his lap.

“James, I love you,” she said into his thigh.

“What was that? I could barely hear you.” She looked at him, her eyes rimmed with red and blood shot, and said it again.

James’s mouth opened wide, sound struggled to free itself “I l...I lo...I absolutely adore you.” The first thing James noticed as the words ran from his lips was the instant build up of tears in her eyes and the path the first tear blazed down her left cheek. James reached up to wipe the tear away but she was too quick and moved out of his reach. Horror ran across her face, then trepidation, then revulsion, as all the

negative emotions a human can have held a marathon across her face, she backed away one step at a time. James stood and began to advance. A tear fell from her right eye matching the left side of her face, a symmetrical display of pain. James came within a foot of her, and that is when she lost any composure she had left and ran, ran as fast as her beautiful legs could carry her. "Beth! Beth!" James cried, each time he screamed her name his desperation was more apparent. At this moment James went over the scene again in his head.

James lay in bed imagining the scene behind the library again and again but each time he could not say the three words that'd make her happy. His patchy beard had gone three days without being shaved. James scratched his neck. He went over it one more time and he just could not say the words. He saw the scene up to that point. Then all of a sudden he was past the point where he stuttered. Only this time he had said the words and she was happy. She was so happy. She said yes to the question he'd asked the night before. He just could not envision himself saying the words. He pulled his blanket over his head and rolled over; his shirts stayed put and got twisted around his body in an uncomfortable way. He began to sweat. He didn't care. He didn't want to see anything but the darkened plaid pattern of his favorite blanket. This time a he spilt tears of his own. James uncurled from the fetal position and lumbered his way into the kitchen almost falling over on his way.

In the kitchen he went to the old brown refrigerator and opened the door. Surveying the contents of a half-drunken gallon of milk, close to the expiration date, moldy lunch meat stuffed into the back of a crisper drawer, four leaves of browning lettuce, a twelve pack of Coke, an energy drink that was open and half drunk because it was for emergencies only, and some decaying something in the bottom drawer, truth be told James didn't know if the mass at the bottom of the fridge was animal, vegetable, or mineral. James settled on the milk and closed the door. Once the fridge door was closed he let go the breath he'd been holding so he wouldn't have to smell rotting things kept in a confined space.

Grabbing a glass from the sink with a quick rinse, James poured a glass of milk. Going into the cupboard that contained one item, all the other cupboards were empty. James grabbed the Nes'quick. Standing at the back of the kitchen by the dinner table in an under shirt and basketball shorts hair greasy and sticking out in thousands of directions. James began to spoon in the dark brown powder turning his milk into a light brown color. James drank the now chocolate milk.

With each sip James's grip got tighter and tighter. Setting the glass down deliberately, James stared at the industrial size container of chocolate powder. The yellow reminded him of Beth wearing his favorite outfit, a light yellow skirt with a tight white T-shirt.

She wore it on their first date, her dark hair in contrast to her light clothes, her blue eyes danced with life. James was suddenly in her dorm room. He saw her folding that skirt and white T-shirt and putting them in a suit case. He saw her taking down from the wall the photos of them. Them on hikes. Them on fishing trips. Them at the beach. James saw those photos going into a shoe box only to be looked at in 30 years when she looked back on the life she could have had. James seized the cardboard can of chocolate powder and hurled it across the room. It hit the corner of the doorway into the hall and burst. A cloud of chocolate powder hit the air and the other wise white kitchen was now brown. A small mountain of powder accumulated on the floor.

He walked past the powder back to his bedroom, the bottoms of his feet accumulating chocolate powder as he left brown footsteps down the hall.

* * *

As James closed the door to his room Carl walked in and saw the mahogany footprints. He stood in the entry way. To his left he saw the foot prints go down the hall to James's room. He looked to his right and saw the kitchen, the scattered chocolate powder, and the mound of chocolate goodness on the floor that was now ruined. In this house if it hit the floor it was dead, no five second rule. Consequences of never mopping. Anger hit Carl and he forcibly had to restrain himself from going and kicking the living crap out of James. He stopped, counted, and tried to remember James was in mourning.

Carl followed the footsteps and grabbed the door handle. Locked. Suck. Carl went back got their only butter knife out of the drawer and went to work on James's doorknob. The job only took Carl three seconds. "Look man, I know you're in a lot of pain right now but could you have spared the Nes'quick? I was looking forward to that," Carl said while throwing the door open.

"Sorry" James mumbled into the wall. His finger began to trace swirling patterns on the wall.

"All I wanna know is why'd you have to kill the Nes'quick?" Carl asked his voice becoming smoother.

"It was the same shade of yellow" James didn't have to elaborate. Carl had often been an admirer of Beth's yellow skirt, and Beth, wearing that yellow skirt.

"So I talked to her today I saw her when she was on the way to the Wash-o-Rama."

"How'd she look? I bet she looked amazing. She always looks amazing."

"Dude, you must be in love because honestly the whole sweats, red rimmed eyes, and unwashed hair just doesn't do it for me," Carl said while rocking on his heels.

"I know I am. I just can't say I am and saying it to her it's like asking me to perform one of Hercules' labors." The reference was a little beyond Carl but he got the implications.

"Dude, she leaves in two days."

"I know!" Carl saw that the blanket covering James started to shudder and Carl knew James was crying. Carl's hand found its way to the back of his own neck and he started to scratch. His feet became antsy and he just wanted the crying to stop.

"Look I was about to go get some food you want anything?" Carl asked unsure what to say.

"Where you going?"

"Taco Bell or McDonald's" Carl's voice gaining confidence as they moved to ground he was comfortable on.

"Two Cheesy Gordita crunches or a Big Mac with fries and a drink."

"What kind of drink?"

"Dr. Pepper or Diet Coke."

"Kay."

"Money is in my wallet on the dresser." With that Carl went to the six drawer particle board dresser covered in a thin layer of cheap veneer painted to look like real wood and sure enough on top were the things James never left the house without, wallet, keys, and cell phone. Carl got the ten dollar bill out of James's wallet and left the house.

* * *

When James heard the front door slam he got up once again, walked down the hall, stopped half way, and got the vacuum out of the hall closet. The main body of the vacuum cleaner and the nozzle were separated by a long hose that often got in the way. James was banging

around the closet and hallway. The slightest touch or uncooperative move by the vacuum cleaner caused him to abuse it all the more. He finally made it to the kitchen, plugging in the vacuum and pushing the on button he began to suck up all the brown. The kitchen was turning white again. Sprinklings of brown remained every where. James got a crusty rag and ran it under the water in the sink and wiped up the brown powder. As he watched the kitchen go from brown to beige back to white he wished he could do that. Erase the chalk board of his life. Well, just the section that involved Beth.

James left the vacuum in the kitchen and went into the entry way. Instead of going down the hall he turned right and went into the small living room. Throwing himself into the brown wool couch with plaid lines of red and green running through it, he closed his eyes. His room was hot with there only being one window and that facing the wrong direction so he couldn't get a breeze. He put his face in the crook of his elbow. Perspiration gathered around his eyes and elbow, with a minor adjustment he peeked over his arm and saw her cup. The one she drank out of the night this had all started.

She was there wearing her famous yellow skirt. They were in the living room of James's apartment sitting on the couch. James had his back in the corner where the arm meets the back of the couch and Beth was sitting using James as her back rest James had his arm around her and they were watching their favorite movie on his laptop, Grosse Pointe Blank. As the final credits started rolling and the Violent Fem's song "Blister in the Sun" started playing, Beth got up, stretched, and turned on the lights. James watched her with a small smile of contentment wishing the status quo would never change. She sat back down on the other side of the sofa and put her feet in James's lap. Without thinking he took her left foot and began to knead it gently. Spending time on each toe and working his way down to the heel then back up to the balls of the feet then back down to the heel. He always finished off each foot with a calf massage, squeezing and pulling running his hand across her freshly shaven legs. James moved to the next foot. When he finished they sat there on the couch neither talking, just content to be in each others' presence.

After a few minutes of sitting there, James's hand resting on her legs, he asked the question he'd always been too afraid to ask before. "Will you stay?" James heard her breath catch. He knew her well enough to know she'd wanted him to ask this question for a long time.

"Why?" She finally managed to say.

“Because I want to be with you and you’re amazing and I couldn’t find anyone better than you.”

“I know, but why do you want me to stay?”

“Because I want to make a life with you, I want to get married, and to do that you and I have to be in the same state.” They had talked of marriage before but the discussion had ended quickly when James found out the deal breaker for Beth was that she was not going to marry anyone that could not tell her exactly how he felt about her. She needed three words to make her happy. To James’s great sadness he could not say those words to her.

“That is all good James, I want to marry you too, but why should I stay?”

“I worship you” James’s eyes began to show genuine distress. James wanted to say the one thing that’d make her happy and make her stay, but he couldn’t. He’d tried to say the words for the first time six months before this night. He’d had a great speech prepared and everything but when he got to the last line he could not use his strong ending and copped out with “I absolutely adore you.” James and Beth had a “define the relationship” talk after that night and he knew she would not be the one to say those words first.

Beth brought James back to the present with, “Why?” She didn’t have to say the rest of the sentence. James’s distress and hopelessness was mounting with every second that passed. Sweat appeared on his brow his eyes danced and his lips twitched.

“I l...I lo...Why must I say those words? Everything else I’ve said means the same thing!” James declared, his voice rising a few decibels. James stood and walked a few paces away.

“No it doesn’t James” she retorted, James heard her emotions rise. “I had a father who could not say those words to me. I never doubted he loved me, but I did not know what it felt like to be told I was loved until my first boyfriend when I was 16. We were young and stupid, but we thought we loved each other. We loved each other as much as we understood what love was. The point is, when he told me he loved me, it warmed my soul. I vowed never to marry or spend the rest of my life with a man who could not say those words and follow them up with action. My father was good on the action part, like you, James, but I need both.” At the end of her speech James stood and faced the wall unable to look at her.

"I want to give you both, but for some reason I can't," he said with his eyes on the floor stinging with shame that he could not be the man she wanted him to be. Beth stood, walked to James, and rested the side of her head on his upper back just below his neck and wrapped her arms around his middle.

"I love you James" she said looking at the wall.

"You know I feel the same way about you" he said in a hushed whisper. James had spoken so quietly he didn't know if sound had escaped from his mouth. It had and Beth heard it. She wiped her eyes with her hand, stepped away from James, got her purse and walked out the door. James stood there staring at the wall while she left unable to move with the weight of his shame heavy on his back.

The next day James saw Beth in the library, studying for her final in her political science class, and asked to talk. James could see that Beth came with hope, naked hope that James would be able to say the words. James led her through the back door of the library to an area that had three trees planted to give students shade. Under each tree was a light gray with black speckles cement picnic table. Under the tables were cement benches colored the same as the tables. The tables, trees, and benches were set up so they were almost in a line but the center table was farther back creating a shallow triangle. James intertwined his fingers with Beth's and led her to the center table the apex of the triangle

"I'm sorry" James started.

"I know and I'm sorry as well."

"You have nothing to be sorry for" James said eyes on the table top. "I'm the idiot in this relationship. You want one thing from me and I can't do it. I'm trying, I really am but when I think of you and saying those words, I can't."

"So you're incapable of loving me? Is that what you're saying?" After the question, the hurtful question was out, Beth stood and walked back to the side walk to get away from James and sat down on the edge. James understood she was hurting inside and was taking it out on him.

"No! That's not it at all!" Mortified that she would even suggest doubts about how he felt about her. He declared, "You're twisting my words around!"

"I only repeated what you said to me in dumbed down language" she retorted.

“I care about you! I want to be with you! Forever!”

“I know you do James but that is just not good enough,” the heat rising in her voice.

“What do you want from me?” he bellowed hands raised in the air to punctuate the fact he was lost in the mountains without a compass when it came to pleasing her.

“Nothing!” She roared back, “absolutely nothing” her voice fading so he didn’t even hear the “ing.” At that moment James saw the relationship, the past year came to an end.

James decided to stop punishing himself and thought about their first kiss, soft and sweet. James could taste her Dr. Pepper lip gloss. He ached inside and went back to his bed. Lying in bed, James put on his earphones, turned up the volume on his ipod, and listened to “Girlfriend” by Eve6 and cried again. The loud music blasting any thoughts away and James was able to sink into a thoughtless sleep.

* * *

Carl came home a few minutes later with a loud bang as the door slammed behind him. “James!” Carl called “I went to Subway and got you a steak and cheese; I hope that’s all right?” When Carl didn’t get an answer he went to James’s room and opened the door. Carl saw James slumped on the bed like a sack of potatoes and began to worry. Making a soft retreat Carl exited James’s room and made his way to the living room.

Throwing himself on the couch Carl got out his cell phone and called Lewis. “Hey dude,” Carl said with a subdued voice into the receiver “I think you need to come over tonight and help James. I think he’s kind of gone off the deep end.” Carl finished with a sigh. “Well, I know studying for your Abnormal Psychology test is, like, really important but I like don’t know what to do. I brought him Subway and I don’t think that’s gonna work.” Carl listened for a few moments. “Well how did I know Subway wasn’t gonna work? It works for me. When a girl leaves me I just get a steak and cheese and maybe some ice cream and then I’m good.” Carl listened some more. “Look dude, I can’t live like this, and I’m pretty sure you’re the only one that can help him right now. He always listens to you.” Carl held the phone away from his ear as a loud sigh came through the receiver. Carl put the phone back up to his ear and mouth. “You’ll come? Great! Six okay?” Carl’s face distorted into a look of irritation. “Yeah, I know that’s only an hour away but, the happiness of more than one person depends on

you." Carl listened again. "Well, I meant me and James but yeah I'm sure if you want to bring Beth into things, fine." There was a short pause on Carl's end of the phone. "The whole thing began when James asked her to stay and her one condition was James telling her he loved her. He couldn't tell her that, which is weird, and then they had another argument, only this time James really screwed up even more calling her a head ache and on top of that he tried to say I love you and failed big time." Another short pause then Carl continued with, "Really big like Beth won't return any of James's calls big." Carl's narrative came to an end. Carl listened to Lewis utter a short sentence then said, "I'll see you at six."

The next hour was tense for Carl. He couldn't watch TV because they didn't have one. He couldn't focus on his homework for his algebra 115 class, or his English 100 class. After failing both attempts at homework Carl went back into James's room for a second and grabbed the steak and cheese. After Carl devoured the sandwich Carl tried his homework again and failed. His mind kept drifting back to James being unable to say "I love you" to Beth. He'd heard James say those very words to a lot of girls. Why was Beth different? These thoughts, and hopes Lewis would be able to help James in some way, made the five to six hour an excruciatingly long hour. At Six o'clock, right on the button, was a knock on the door. Carl jumped off the couch and, at a speed only slightly slower than the speed of light, flew to the door. Ripping it open, Carl threw his arms around Lewis's large frame. "Thank heavens you're here" Carl declared.

"Where is the patient?" Was all Carl got as an answer.

"In bed, asleep."

"Good that'll give us a little time to set up," Lewis said. With that Lewis entered the apartment, went straight into the living room, and began to rearrange the furniture.

"James can you come in here?" Carl bellowed when they were finished. In response, they heard a loud moan that could have been a no. "Get your boxered butt in here you slug!" Carl returned.

"Fine!" returned the door to James's room. Then James's door opened and a haggard James stepped into the hall. His hair was teased out in a thousand directions, his forehead gleamed with perspiration, his basketball shorts were ratty and stained, and his favorite M.A.S.H. 4077th shirt was stained and twisted in several directions. The tops of his socks had fallen around his ankles making them like cloth anklets, and he was wearing his gross purple robe that was so old James was

afraid it would fall apart around him if he sneezed too hard. James began to walk down the hall and began missing steps and catching himself. At the sight of James, Carl slipped out of the room, all the talk of feelings made him uncomfortable

* * *

James entered the living room and the couch and the recliner had been rearranged. The recliner was now to the side and slightly behind the couch. James saw Lewis in his tweed coat with leather patches on the elbows with his blue button up shirt and red tie. As Lewis stood to greet James, his dark brown khakis with the perfect crease became apparent. James walked up to him and took Lewis's extended hand and looked into his eyes through his thick rimmed glasses. "Have a seat James" Lewis said pointing to the couch. James stood there staring at him as Lewis's smile pulled the skin on his pointy nose taunt. "Please" Lewis said, the point of his nose going up and down as his smile was released and reformed. James let go of a sigh he'd been holding back since he left his room and sat down.

"Lie flat please" asked Lewis.

James stretched out on the couch with a, "Fine!" Lewis took a seat in the recliner.

"How have been the last three days James?"

"If you're here I'm sure you've heard what's happened."

"Yes, Carl told me," Lewis said in an even soothing tone. Lewis's hands were almost in classic prayer form; his hands were together with his palms separated but the finger tips were still touching, his pointer and middle fingers resting against his mouth.

"Look Lewis, I don't want to talk about it."

"Why are you being hostile, James?"

"Look, I don't want to talk about it."

"Do you want Beth to stay?"

"Of course."

"Well then, you need to talk to me."

"Fine!"

"Can we do it without the snippy attitude?"

"All right" James sighed.

"So, why are you having trouble saying "I love you" to Beth?"

"I don't know. I honestly don't know. I've said it to almost every girlfriend I've had since I was fifteen. So, I don't know why I can't say it."

"Did you really mean those words every time you've said them?"

"Well, no, not all the time. Sometimes I said it just because the girl wanted to hear it. Sometimes, I said it so she'd make out with me."

"How many girls have you said those words to?"

"I lost count somewhere around 30." Lewis's eyebrows raised and his eyes opened wider and that was all the emotion he betrayed to James.

"How long ago did you lose count?" Lewis asked, the point of his nose going up and down.

"'bout a year or so ago," James replied.

"Hhhmmm...and have you said it to every girl you've ever dated or conned into making out with?"

"Just about," James said with a shrug.

"And you've never meant it before?"

"Sometimes I meant it a little more than just arbitrary signifiers in a sign system."

"So, there was, some feelings attached?" Lewis's tone staying even.

"Occasionally."

"But you never really felt love when you've said those words?"

"You're not getting the idea are you?" James replied his voice rising. "No! No! I've never said those words to someone I've actually cared about in that way," he finished with a loud sigh.

"So there are no feelings attached to those words for you? Would you say they've become cheap?"

"Yeah that's it exactly!"

"Would you call Beth cheap?"

"Hell no! What's the matter with you? Asking a question like that."

"This is an interesting conundrum. You have two opposing values, cheap and priceless. Your words are cheap and she is priceless. Hhhmmm. What do you think?"

"I don't know. You're right though I find the words "I love you" cheap."

"Would you buy Beth a cheap bracelet?"

"No, she doesn't like jewelry."

“So if you were to get her a gift what would you get her?”

“A first edition of the Importance of Being Earnest or an original playbill for Death of a Salesman,” James said.

“So nothing cheap?”

James shot a look at Lewis, the look spoke a thousand words and they all said “you’re crazy,” James remained silent.

“Would you consider the words a gift?”

“The only one she wants. Oh, oh, oh my giddy aunt, you’re right,” James lay there awestruck.

“I didn’t say anything.”

“Yeah, yeah you did, you said that I’m incapable of saying I l...feel that way about Beth because I’ve said it too much and the words are cheap, and I value Beth too much to give her cheap things.”

“That was all you, bud.”

“Okay, so now we know what the problem is, how do we fix it?”

“In the long run it’d take years of therapy trying to retrain you how to attach feelings to those words but in the mean time I want you to remember that all those feelings you feel towards Beth are called love.”

“Okaaay?”

“Now I want you to close your eyes.” James closed his eyes and began to hear Lewis’s voice narrating a scene in James’s head. James was suddenly on a green hill. All around him were fields there was nothing around for miles. The temperature was perfect at 75 degrees. A cool wind was blowing in from the left and felt refreshing on his scalp. There was no sun, but it was sunny with a perfect blue sky. James let out a long sigh of relaxation and an easy calm settled over James. He hadn’t felt calm in days. As the narration continued everything started to fade to white and warmth. No thoughts ran through James’s mind. They didn’t even crawl through. James was completely blank. He heard a slow calm voice say “Without thinking, answer the next question as concisely as you can. How do you feel about Beth?”

In the warmth and white James felt a welling up of feeling in the pit of his stomach and said “I love Beth.” James’s eyes popped open he sat bolt upright looked at Lewis. His eyes said “Did that just happen?” James shot to his feet and said, “I love Beth.” Before Beth’s name left his mouth James was running. He ran out the door of the apartment.

Carl heard the door slam and inched his way back into the living room. Noticing that James had left and not Lewis, Carl stood to his full height and walked with confidence to the couch. He launched himself into the couch stretched out and asked, "How'd it go?"

"Surprisingly well," Lewis responded.

"Well that's good. Man, you cannot believe how hard this has been on me the past couple days. Take today, for example, for no good reason he threw the Nes'quick into the wall and ruined it. Nes'quick is, like, my one treat a day, man."

"Hmmm that's very interesting. How did that make you feel?" Lewis asked, sitting back in his chair and crossing his legs while a pensive look took up residence on his face.

"Angry, you know he had no right to hurt the Nes'quick. I don't know. I guess... I'm overly touchy when it comes to chocolate milk. It just reminds me of my childhood. Growing up in a large family you don't get very many treats, and chocolate milk was one of the only treats my parents could afford."

"Hmmm...tell me about your childhood," Lewis said while nodding as if everything Carl said was revealing great truths of the universe, as seen by Carl.

"Well, it was great. I had a good family my brothers and sisters were mostly nice to me and we had a ton of fun. And, my mom, she was a trooper." A slow smile spread across Lewis's face.

"Good...good, tell me about your mother."

"Well..."

While Carl was being psychoanalyzed against his will, well it would have been against his will if he'd known, James ran down the hallway past the other apartments, his robe flying behind him, his socked feet hitting the cold hard wood of the hall floor. He ran down the stairs, down all four flights. He shoved the door to the outside open and ran to his car. Searching his pockets for his keys and he realized they were on his dresser next to his phone and wallet. James kicked off his socks turned and kept running, his feet felt the rugged grooves of the sidewalk. He ran, strangely feeling no fatigue. He ran, the hot August air blowing through his chestnut hair, but he didn't feel it. He ran the route He and Beth had often walked at night to spend that extra time together. He ran the mile and a half to her building.

Someone was walking out of the building as he came to the door. He pushed his way into the building and kept running up the five flights of stairs up to her apartment. James pounded on the door as hard as he could. The door opened on Jane, Beth's roommate, he pushed his way into the apartment. Moving down the hall he opened Beth's door. She had her back to the door. She was all the way across the room staring at a bulletin board. The board was covered in photos of them at different stages of their relationship, she reached up to take one down, "Don't" he said.

Beth turned and faced him. She was wearing a giant T-shirt that had a picture of a bear and her cub on the front. The T-shirt went down to her knees. He walked past her two loaded suitcases, reached his hand up and hooked his hand around the back of her neck and pulled her into a kiss. She didn't resist, she kissed him back full of gusto and passion. He pulled back and said "I love you." They kissed again, longer his other hand found its way to the small of her back, her hands made it into his hair. They pulled away from each other a look of concern crossed his face.

"What is the matter?" Beth asked, with worry embedded in her words

"Carl ate my sandwich," he said in alarm. As quickly as the thought came, it left and James pulled Beth close and said, "I love you." He whispered in her ear, "I love you."

Hollow Road

Cat Conner

The fat sat on me like an oversized hoodie that I couldn't take off. No matter how much I pinched and pulled at my skin, like a skilled baker kneading dough into its proper shape, I couldn't get into my proper shape. My thighs ran over the metal chair exposing tiny pockets of fat that hadn't managed to saturate and my underwear cut into fleshy folds under my backside. I hungered for the emptiness of skin and bone, lusting after bodies that would walk into class in size two jeans, hips succulently peeking at me above the waistband.

I looked at the cookie in my hand, moist and buttery and oozing chocolate like a skillful temptress. I pushed it to the side of my desk, trying to ignore its subtle entreaties. The smell of dough and vanilla extract tickled my nostrils and sent my left hand flying back to where I had exiled the treat. I brought it to my lips, overwhelmed by its creamy splendor. Endorphins laughed inside of me, my body's pleasure dome satisfied. My bones yearned to be relieved from the heavy cage of tissue that suffocated them with every bite of the buttery byproduct.

I felt the cookie begin to take shape in places that had already acquired enough dimension of their own, if you could call my figure dimensional. If you put me in a Tupperware container, I would probably ooze and conform to its shape. I knew exactly where this circular sin was going, how many calories it contained (250) and which portion of my body it would "illuminate." This particular cookie felt like it was probably sharing its glory between my right butt cheek and love handles. I watched Maureen Pepper, the skinniest girl in school, slathering a giant celery stick with yellow mustard (which coincidentally contains zero calories) with her four inch wrist. I wanted to rip the mustard packet out of her arm and wipe it all over her high cheekbones.

Although I loathed people like Maureen Pepper, I had attempted for the past two years to look exactly like them. Only, I was convinced that I would be much prettier once I had lost twenty pounds because I didn't dress like the mass population or rat my hair into extinction. At

the end of each school year, I would restrict myself to a certain number of calories a day, keeping an accurate log for about two meals (that was usually how long it took before something loaded with sugar, carbs, fat or all three appeared in my line of sight).

The desire for emaciation raged inside of me with each failed attempt at hollowness. Food always stood in the way. No matter how many times I cleared my room of Snickers bars, Swedish Fish, and Peanut Butter Hershey's Kisses (drool...), overly caloric items manifested themselves before me in some form of baked goods. My mother, though a certified personal trainer, never helped. Once, she went through a phase where she put cheese on top of everything: rice, potatoes, beans, and even summer sausage. Cheese was the reason I went from a size eight to a twelve the first half of my senior year in high school. You could probably coat my gym socks in Velveeta and the smooth consistency and irresistible tang would be enough to stifle a few weeks of moldy sweat so that I couldn't resist its charms.

The corporate world also failed to stint my insatiable capacity to inhale edible matter. Companies always seemed to be coming out with culinary masterpieces when I needed them least. The year Krispy Kreme came to Utah, I lost an "A" on my science fair project because I was up the night before driving forty-five minutes to the nearest location. The local potato-based doughnut shop cost me five tardies over the course of two weeks, (my parents had taken the car to Vegas) and a new sliver of stretched flesh on my left thigh. People complain about the dishonesty of tobacco companies, but at least they put warning labels on their advertisements. Nowhere on a package of Swiss chocolate are you going to find the words "WARNING: May cause cellulite and public ridicule."

Though the numbers on the scales increased and the number of dates I had in high school siphoned off at zero, I never had to wonder if I would be able to find the latest version of the "Reese's peanut butter cup" at the grocery store. The candy aisle would always be across from the cookie aisle, right next to the fresh baked goods. The other "left side of the store" shoppers gave me comfort with their greedy eyes. They knew what it was like to travel to the right side, only to have someone in produce gawk at them. During a stressful social situation or a final exam, nothing sedated my nerves quicker than a bag of Pepperidge Farm cookies and whole milk. In the world of food, double churned 80% cream dark chocolate was my heroine.

Though I was born with an affinity for the trans-fatty universe, I wasn't always pleasantly plump. In junior high, people thought I was bulimic because I was lucky enough to not have hit the boobs, hips, and butt stage of puberty, yet. The transformation was a slow one and I'm sure I would not have noticed my weight gain if it weren't for my brothers. They delighted in pointing and guffawing at my new clothing that, although it was a larger size, never ceased to expose my muffin tops or my behind that I probably could have watched growing like a fetus on the Discovery Channel. "Cat, you're so fat," they would scream as I walked in the front door, usually with a paper sack already soaked on the bottom in hamburger sweat. They would proceed to make beeping noises like a semi-truck backing up whenever I got up from the dinner table. Somehow the fact that I could sit on two of them at a time in order to shut them up, always left me wanting more, or less, of myself.

* * *

I weigh nothing; I am nothing, but the only nothing that is something to me.

My hip cracked as I stepped off the scale, 120 pounds. The half cup of cream cheese, my only sustenance for the day, cried in my concave stomach for company. I slapped it and walked out of the gym smiling, my insides churning with emptiness.

"Hello Kitty Cat! You want some spaghetti?" My mom said as I walked in the front door.

My mother had painted the kitchen red, a color that supposedly makes people hungry. No wonder everyone in my family spent the majority of their time in there, stuffing their faces with complex carbohydrates and the high sugar concentrate my mother dared to call "spaghetti sauce." Whenever I walked in the room I kept my focus on the checkerboard linoleum or the purified water spigot. I poured myself a 24 ounce glass and watched my stomach expand with retention.

"Why would I want spaghetti?" I spat. "There are like 180 calories in half a cup and absolutely no protein."

"I was just making a suggestion," My mother sighed, pulling a colander from the top of the fridge. "You can have peanut butter and jelly if you don't like what I'm making."

"Are you serious? Peanut butter and jelly? I might as well call Jenny Craig right now."

“You’re lucky enough to have food at all, young lady. I’m happy that you want to be healthy, but I don’t want to hear any more of this calorie business.”

“Neither does your body,” I mumbles on my way to my room, locking the door and succumbing to my emptiness before my mother could try and rebuke me.

Once I lost the first ten pounds, the rest was never enough. After ten, people kept telling me how good I looked, how flat my stomach was, how jealous they were.

“How do you do it?” Someone would ask me at a church activity, where the heaviest food and people seemed to congregate.

I would look at the root beer float in their hands and smirk, “Oh you know, exercise, diet, all of that.”

“All of that” was my religion, the complete explication of my soul and all of my willpower of calorie counting and refrigerator avoidance. I devoted myself to hollowness, the ability to make my middle finger and thumb touch around my wrist. Nothing was more exhilarating than stepping on the scale and watching the numbers creep closer toward the “one hundred and teens” nothing more melodious than the sound of my shoulder popping from lack of fatty lubrication.

Losing weight was my best subject in college. Finally away from my parents, most particularly my father’s adultery with Ben and Jerry, I was no longer subjected to gargantuan portions tailored to teenage boys. Even though the school required all freshman students to eat in the cafeteria, I had the final say on what was going into my mouth. My best friend’s mother once told me, “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels.” I repeated the mantra in my head every time a friend would offer me a cupcake or extra piece of cornbread.

“Cat, you’ve got to have a treat every once in a while,” they would tell me, thrusting a confection topped in a mound of whipped cream and sprinkles in my face.

“You go right ahead,” I would reply, stabbing my fork into a small mound of brown rice. Whoever offered me food seemed happier at the prospect of getting extra dessert anyway. Even though our meal plans allowed us, students, to eat as much as we wanted, my friends seemed to receive much more delight with the “gift” I gave them in rejecting their offerings.

Every night during my first semester as a freshman, I worked at the local luau. Though I ended the night covered in unrecognizable

mixtures of shredded pork, poi, and raw fish, resulting in an avid distaste for any meal following work, my appetite had its eye on one dessert in particular, the elusive pineapple bar. Though small, it was lethal, packed with brown sugar, butter (or worse...margarine), and infused with syrupy pineapple filling. Night after night it spoke to my soul; I found myself entranced, unable to ignore the sugary siren's dulcet consistency.

That's what people don't understand; the difference between hunger and appetite. I may have suppressed mine, but every time I stepped in front of a cinnamon coated confection, appetite awakened inside me like a dormant beast. I could feel the pounds from only months before creeping their way into my slender tissue. Though my belly was bereft of hunger, the bars would continue to stimulate my appetite, teasing senses that yearned to be held by the lost flavor.

After only a month at college and countless rejections of pizza, doughnuts, and the local delicacy of chocolate covered macadamia nuts, the pineapple bars defeated my willpower. One night I walked toward the luau exit after an exhausting shift, juice from scraping uneaten food crusted to my wrists. My fellow employees were milling around half empty trays like wild beasts in the Sahara. They had eaten most of the desserts, but one tray remained untouched. The pineapple bars glowed on their thick, plastic tray like the Holy Grail to my escalating craving. I could feel my insides yearning for their company. My fingers danced around the tray, flicking in the fluorescent lighting, singing promises of satisfaction. Under the resurrection of my former impulses, my hand shot for the largest bar, my palm tinged with rebellion. The tip of my tongue touched the grainy surface. Endorphins raced through my body, jubilant with release.

As I walked home, I could feel masticated, empty calories and congealed pineapple making their way down my digestive track, sticking to my stomach lining as they undoubtedly would to every crevice of my body that had ever known weight. I pinched the area under my butt cheeks though my polyester uniform. Before I began to carve my body into its svelte state, my thigh merged with my butt in a glorious welding of fat on fatter. Now, I had a perfect, half-moon line that looked like a butt crevice carved by Michelangelo. By morning, pebble-sized pockets would be springing up along the back of my thigh, smudging the appearance of my work of art.

Once I reached my dorm room, I threw my cell phone and work ID on the bed and drummed my fingers along my firm stomach. My

roommate was gone, as was every other resident of the dormitory. The bathroom was empty, the stall door inviting me into a world I hadn't dared to enter before. With the fear of a cellulite hangover pounding against my skull, I started to shake and placed my knees on the pale purple tile. The tiny square pattern digging into my skin, shooting chilly tingles up my legs that would be larger by morning if I didn't proceed. *Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels.*

I craned my head over the toilet, uncertain of what to do next. In nineteen years, the only times I had ever so much as gagged were when I was brushing my teeth and my toothbrush ventured too far against the lining at the back of my throat. I stuck my finger against the side of my cheek, sliding it toward my tonsils. The bitter taste of human flesh produced saliva in the glands under my tongue. I choked on the excrement, but kept my finger slithering along the surface near the back of my tongue. Finally I retched, spitting about a teaspoon of stomach acid into the porcelain well before me. The longer I kept returning my finger to the rear of my throat, the harder my stomach pumped, until I no longer had to enforce control and solid matter projected itself into the latrine. The pineapple bar, once caught in a mamba of dry heaving, glided out almost as effortlessly as it had come in, though it tasted like saltwater and bile. Incomparable relief quieted my nerves as I watched the pineapple bar, accompanied by stray chunks of lettuce, dance in the reflective surface of the toilet water.

I looked at my finger, coated in stray bits of digested sugar clumps. I washed my hands three times, brushed my teeth four, and grabbed a towel from my room. I went back into the bathroom to take a shower, stopped by the same image of the stall door. Shivers ran across my cheeks with the memory of my body attacking itself under my command. I stood in front of the wall-width mirror in only a bra and panties, my bright green towel slung over my bony shoulder. I splayed my palm across my belly, feeling the soft, tiny hairs (caused by insufficient nutrients) as I caressed its dimensions. Returning my gaze to the mirror, I studied my reflection: poky hips, a concave belly, and high cheekbones, streamlined and hollow, just like I had always wanted.

Nunda, New York

Josh Weber



